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MAY 1921

WILLIAM PATTERSON WHITE'S New Western Serial

Fiction: Irving Bacheller · Frederick Orin Bartlett · George F. Worts · Katharine Fullerton Gerould · Nalbro Bartley · Maxwell Smith

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EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE

Number 5 MAY, 1921 Vol. XLIV

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COVER by F. CHOATE

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WILLIAM PATTERSON WHITE

NALBRO BARTLEY

IRVING BACHELLER

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With

EVERYBODY'S PUBLISHERS

IN EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE for February, there was a great horse story by Gerald Beaumont, under the title "Lil' Ol' Red Stockings." The response to the story on the part of readers of the magazine has been so interesting and, in a way, so typical, that we want you to share the knowledge with us of the way a good story is received, commented on, and put to work by different folks of different minds.

There should come first the letter from Dr. E. L. Hills, of Center, North Dakota, who represents the sharp-eyed, keenly-interested reader who, with facts at his finger-tips, keeps everybody connected with the magazine on their toes to avoid error. Here is Dr. Hills' letter:

> Dear Sir—Your story "Lil' Ol' Red Stockings," was a good one. *But*—to hang up 2.02 as a record for a *running* horse. I have horses working on the plow that can beat 2.02. Salvator *ran* a mile in 1.36 and thousands have run better than 1.45. 2.02 was a record for a trotting horse some years ago.
>
> A Constant Reader.

This catches all of us in a real mistake. Even Mr. Beaumont who, of course through oversight, made the time for a mile 2.02 in his manuscript, and, strangely enough, emphasized the mistake on the author's proof sent to him away out in California and returned to us before printing in the magazine. We say "emphasized" because where we had written the time "two minutes and two seconds," Mr. Beaumont ran his pencil through this on the proof, and on the margin of the proof wrote "2.02."

The mistake is, of course, explained by the fact that Mr. Beaumont was thinking, as all the rest of us were, not of the time of a mile, for this was only a trial preparatory to the Pennington Handicap, the distance of which was a mile and a quarter, and is so stated in the story. That time is certainly fast enough for that distance, and would extend even the great "Man o' War."

We are really grateful to Dr. Hills for his careful reading of the story and his kindly correction.

Then here is the second type of reader, who not only enjoys the story, but finds in it a lesson, and having found the lesson, applies it. This reader is Mr. F. E. Batturs, a Traffic Chief of the Southern Pacific Company, who sent out from his office in San Francisco, on January twenty-fourth, to traffic men all up and down the lines of the Southern Pacific, this circular:

A LESSON IN SALESMANSHIP

> Confidence in the goods to be sold is the key-note of good salesmanship. Pride in the "line" represented is the second requisite and naturally follows a knowledge that the goods offered are as claimed to be. A third requirement is enthusiasm in our work, backed by a determination to leave nothing each day undone to advance the "line" we are selling and incidentally our own success, so that both may be marked up as "winners."
>
> Our Ticket Salesmen and all who sell our travel and shipping facilities, have for their "line" Southern Pacific Transportation. Our Directors and Officers are doing everything that is possible to make the service thus offered the best that can be provided, and our Salesmen may have full confidence therefore that the goods they are selling are second to none.
>
> In the February number of EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE there is a short story, entitled "Lil' Ol' Red Stockings," by Gerald Beaumont, which carries through it a lesson that might well be applied to Southern Pacific salesmanship. Mr. Beaumont's story, of course, was not written with any such intent, but nonetheless the lesson is there and may therefore be taken to heart perhaps more freely than if cut and dried, and prescribed in per diem doses. The story furthermore is "easy" to read; its sentiment grips you from the first and holds you to the finish. It is a story of absolute faith—the unwavering confidence of an old trainer in a broken-down racehorse, whose pedigree shows an unbroken line of "winners." It contains a subtle picture of animal affection and has a finish with a true California punch—or rather "kick" to it.
>
> Everybody, as represented by our "Sales" force, should, I think, read this little story.

We are justified in suspecting that the twenty-five cent investment which Mr. Batturs made in the February EVERYBODY'S, brought him a substantial return. It certainly has brought us an unmeasured amount of pleasure here in the office.

Then, finally, here is the third type—Mr. Beaumont has forwarded to us a letter received by him from one of EVERYBODY'S readers in Austin, Texas, which is as follows:

> Mr. Gerald Beaumont:
>
> "Lil' Ol' Red Stockings"—
>
> Man alive, but that's a story!
>
> When I read it my body was in a smoking compartment of a Pullman car, but I lived with *Sandy McKee* at the old fair grounds, Pleasanton, California, and throbbed with him in the Pennington Handicap, Latonia.
>
> Any one who can write such a story, should be given the Nobel prize and a place in the Hall of Fame!
>
> Thanks for the story for which I hope EVERYBODY'S paid you five a word.

So here are three distinct and representative types of readers of the contents of EVERYBODY'S, and we'll confess frankly that we could not get along without the help we get from a frank statement of the point of view of each type.

Please note, in passing, the geographical distribution of these good folks, one writing from North Dakota, one from Texas, and one reacting to the yarn out in California.

If, out of the nearly twelve thousand manuscripts passing through the editorial rooms here in the course of a year, the selection of the hundred and thirty or forty finally used provoked exactly this reaction, something would certainly be wrong. The machine would be too perfect and better adapted for the museum than the hurly-burly of a work-a-day world. We are all kept firmly on our feet and digging hard by still another type of comment summed up in this little extract from a letter from another reader in Amherst, Massachusetts, who says, concerning a story in a later number:

> Never in my life have I read a story more devoid of emotion, interest, description, and (more surprisingly) the feeling of gripping mystery which any sort of a detective story usually produces. The only feeling which this feeble attempt inspires is contempt or pity.

So that brings our average down to a livable human sort of figure.

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Photo by Clarence Purchase.

The Lure of the Sawdust Ring.

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Everybody's Magazine

NUMBER FIVE MAY, 1921 VOLUME XLIV

"You boasted that no man had ever kissed you. Well, you're kissed now and you won't forget it in a hurry."

The Rider of Golden Bar*

The Beginning of a Big Western Serial

By William Patterson White

Author of "Paradise Bend," "Hidden Trails," "Lynch Lawyers," etc.

Chapter One

Billy Wingo

"BUT why don't you *do* something, Bill?" demanded Sam Prescott's pretty daughter.

Bill Wingo looked at Miss Prescott in injured astonishment. "Do something?" he repeated. "What do you want me to do?"

"I don't want you to do anything," she denied with unnecessary emphasis. "Haven't you any ambition?"

"Plenty."

"Then use it, for Heaven's sake!"

"I do. Don't I ask you to marry me every time I get a chance?"

"That's not using your ambition. That's playing the fool."

"Nice opinion of yourself you've got," he grinned.

"Never mind. You make me tired, Bill. Here you've got a little claim and a little bunch of cows—the makings of a ranch if you'd only work. But instead of working like a man you loaf like a—like a——"

"Like a loafer," he prompted.

"Exactly. You'd rather hunt and fish and ride the range for monthly wages when you're broke than scratch gravel and make something of yourself. You let your cows run with the T-Up-And-Down, and I'll bet when Tuckleton had his spring round-up you weren't even on the job. Were you?"

"Well, I—uh—I was busy." Shamefacedly.

"Fishing over on Jack's Creek. That's how busy you were, when you should have been looking after your property."

"Oh, Tuckleton's boys are square. Any calves they found running with my brand, they'd run the iron on 'em all right."

"They'd run the iron on 'em all right," she repeated. "But what iron?"

"Why—mine. Whose do you suppose?"

"I don't know," she said candidly. "I'm asking you."

"Shucks, Sally Jane, those boys wouldn't do anything crooked. Tuckleton wouldn't allow it."

"Bill, don't you ever distrust anybody?"

"Not until I'm certain they're crooked."

"I see," said the lady disgustedly. "After you wake up and find your hide, together with the rest of your worldly possessions, hanging on the fence, then and not till then do you come alive to the fact that perhaps all was not right."

"Well——" began Bill.

"Don't you see by that time it's too late?" interrupted the lady.

"Aw, I dunno. I—I suppose so."

"You suppose so, do you? You suppose so. Don't you know, my innocent William, that there are a sight more criminals outside of jail than there are in?"

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"Why, Sally Jane!" said the innocent William, scraping a fie-fie forefinger at her. "Shame on you, shame on you, you wicked girl. I *am* surprised. Such thoughts in a young maid's mind. No, I ain't either. I always said if your pa sent you away to school you'd lose your faith in human nature. He did; and you did. And now look at you, talking just like a district attorney. And suspicious—I'd tell a man!"

"Oh, darn!" wailed Sally Jane. "I hate a fool!"

"So do I," concurred Bill warmly. "Tell a feller who's the fool you hate and I'll hate him, too. One pair of haters working together might do said fool a lot of good."

"Sometimes, Bill, my fingers simply ache to smack your long and silly ears."

He nodded soberly. "I know. I often have the same feeling about people. But don't let it worry you. It don't mean anything."

"Bill, can't you understand that I like you, and——"

"Easily," he grinned. "Of course you like me. So do lots of other people. It comes natural. And that is another thing you mustn't let worry you, Sally Jane. Just you take that liking for me and tend it real careful. Put it on the window-sill between the pink geraniums and water it morning, noon and night, and by and by that li'l liking will wax strong and great and all that sort of thing, and you won't be able to do without me. You'll have to marry me, I'm afraid, Sally Jane."

"I will, will I? And you're afraid, are you? You big, overgrown, lazy lummox! I wouldn't marry you ever."

"I'm not so sure, but you needn't stamp your foot at me anyway. It ain't being done this season. People slam doors instead. I'm sorry there isn't a door near at hand. It must have been overlooked when Linny's Hill was made."

"Bill, don't fool. This is not any joking matter. This come-day-go-day attitude of yours is bad business. It's ruining you, really it is."

"Drink and the devil, huh?"

"Oh, you're decent enough far as that goes. You never have been beastly."

"I thank you, madam, for this good opinion of your humble servant."

"Shut up! I mean to say— What I'm trying to beat into your thick head, you simple thing, is that in this world you don't stand still. You can't. You either go ahead or you slip back: And—you aren't going ahead."

"IF NOT, why not, huh? I know you mean well, Sally Jane, and——"

"And it's none of my business? Oh, I know you weren't going to say that, but you think it. You're quite right, Bill—but can't you see I'm talking for your own good?"

"Sure, yes. My pa used to talk just like that before he'd go out behind the corral with a breeching-strap in one hand and my ear in the other. I've heard him many's the time. I used to hurt most unpleasant for two-three days after, special if he'd forget which end of the strap carried the buckle. Old times, old times. Now, I take it you were never licked, Sally Jane. That was a mistake. You should have been— What? You don't mean to say you're going home? And we were getting along so nicely too. Well, if wilful must, she must. I'll hold your horse for you. Again let me offer my apologies for the lack of a door."

He sagged down on his heel and watched her ride away along the side of Linny's Hill.

"I've often heard a woman's 'no' doesn't mean what it says," he muttered, fishing out the makings from a vest pocket. "But Sally Jane is so persistent with it, I dunno. I wonder if I really love her, or do I only think I do because I can't have her? I suppose I'd feel worse'n I do every time she turns me down if I did. Lord! she said, I said, he said, and may Gawd have mercy on your soul!"

When his cigaret was going well he lazed over on his side, supporting his head on a crooked arm and gazed abroad between half-shut lids.

The view from Linny's Hill was all that could be desired. At the base of the hill the Golden Bar-Hillsville trail, a yellow-gray ribbon across the green, led the eye across flats and gentle rises through shady groves of pine and cedar westward to where Golden Bar, a collection of toy houses, each one startlingly clear and distinct in that rarefied atmosphere, sprawled along the farther bank of Wagonjack River.

THE stream itself, a roaring river in the spring of the year, was now but a poor thing. Shrunk to quarter-size, and fordable almost anywhere, it flowed in sedate and midsummer fashion between its cut-banks and miniature bluffs. Bordered throughout its length by willows and cottonwoods, Wagonjack River meandered and wound its way southward from the blue and hazy tumble of peaks that was the main range of the Medicine Mountains to where the wide and pleasant reaches of the Peace Pipe watered the southern section of the territory.

From Golden Bar to the Medicine Mountains was a long two hundred miles. From Golden Bar to the Peace Pipe was twice that distance.

Crocker County, four hundred miles long by three hundred miles wide, bounded on the east by the Wagonjack, ran well up into the Medicine Mountains before giving way to Storey County. Across the river from Crocker were two counties, of which Tom Read County was the northern and Piegan County the southern. Shaler County ran the whole length of the southern side of Crocker, whose western line was the boundary of the neighboring territory.

There you have Crocker, a county three hundred miles wide by four hundred miles long, and Golden Bar was its county-seat.

Political pickings in Crocker, which pickings the neighbors called a much worse name, were consistently good. A small Indian reservation lay partly in Crocker and partly in Shaler, but somehow the Crocker citizens always secured the beef contracts. Crocker laws, provided the suspected person or persons were friendly with the county officials, were not administered with undue severity. Coarse work was never tolerated, naturally; but if one was judicious and a good picker, one could travel far and profitably. Thus it may be seen that Crocker was, as counties go, fertile ground for easy consciences.

But, like Gallio, Bill Wingo cared for none of these things. He watched the moving pencil-end that was Miss Prescott and her mount descend to the trail and ride along it in the direction of Golden Bar.

Another pencil-end was riding the same trail—away from Golden Bar. Traveling at their present rate of speed, the riders would meet not far from the scattering grove of cedars marking the entrance to the low-walled draw that led to the Prescott ranch-house.

Bill Wingo intently scrutinized the wayfarer from Golden Bar side.

"Looks like Jack Murray's sorrel," he mused, holding the cigaret in the corner of his mouth and rocking it up and down. "If they stop, it's Jack."

The pencil-ends drew together at the lower end of the grove. They stopped.

"Shucks," Mr. Wingo muttered mildly. "I never did like that man."

Said the first pencil-end to the second pencil-end, "Hello, Sally Jane!"

"Morning, Jack!"

"I was just ariding to your place."

"Don't let me stop you."

"I'll ride along with you."

"It's a free country." She lifted her reins and "kissed" to her horse. "And at times I've known you to be amusing, Jack. It's four miles to our ranch and you'll help to brighten the weary way."

He spurred alongside and turned in his saddle to stare at her.

"Is that all I'm good for—to help pass the time?"

"What else is a man good for?"

"Don't be so flip, Sally Jane. You know——" He stopped short.

She waited a moment. Then, "I know what?"

"You know I've been loving you a long, long time," he said abruptly. "I didn't want to tell you till I had something to offer you besides myself. And now I've got something—Rafe Tuckleton has promised to make me sheriff."

"I thought the voters usually decided such things," said she.

He laughed cynically. "Not in Crocker. *We* know the better way. Well, I've told you, Sally Jane. What do you say?"

SHE looked at him coolly. "What is this—a proposal?"

"Sure, I want you to marry me."

"No, you don't." There was no hint of coquetry in either her tone or the direct gaze of her violet eyes.

He crowded his horse almost against hers and dropped a hand on top of her hand where it lay on the saddle horn. She did not withdraw her hand at his touch: She simply suffered it impassively.

"Don't you understand?" he said earnestly. "Don't you understand that I love you, Sally Jane? And I want you."

Sally Jane continued to look at him.

"I understand that you want me," she told him calmly. "Why not? You're dark and tall and thick-lipped and headstrong. I'm slim and red-haired and my mouth is full, too—but I'm not headstrong, thank Heaven. My type appeals to your type, that's all. Appeals physically, I mean. You'd like to possess me, but you don't love me, Jack Murray."

"I tell you——" he began passionately.

"You don't have to tell me," she said calmly. "I know."

"How do you know?"

"By your eyes."

"My eyes!"

"Your eyes. Love is something besides desire, Jack. I know that lots of men don't think so; but women know. You

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bet women know. And I, for one, don't intend to risk my happiness on a twenty-to-one-shot."

"What you talking about?" he demanded, scowling and withdrawing his hand.

"You—and me—us. If I married you, it's twenty to one our marriage would be unhappy. There's too much of the animal in you, Jack."

"You listen to me, Sally. I tell you I love you and I'm going to have you."

"I said you only wanted to possess me," she observed placidly.

"Dammit, I tell you——"

"That's right, swear," she interrupted. "A man always does that when he can't think of anything else to say."

"I'm gonna marry you," he persisted sullenly.

"If it does you any good, keep right on thinking so. It can't hurt me."

"Has Bill Wingo——" he began, but sensed his mistake and stopped—too late.

"YOU mean am I in love with Billy Wingo?" she put in helpfully. "My answer is, not at present."

"Meaning that you may be later on, I suppose."

"I didn't say so. Lord, man, haven't I a right to bestow my heart anywhere I like? I intend to, old-timer."

"You ain't gonna marry anybody but me," he insisted stubbornly.

"There you go again. Leave the melodrama alone, can't you? This isn't a play. It's real life."

"I said I was gonna have you and I am," he said slowly. "Neither Bill Wingo nor anybody else is gonna get you. You were always intended for me. You're mine, understand, mine!"

Jamming his horse against hers he pinioned both her hands with his right, swung his left arm round her waist and crushed her gasping against his chest. Be sure she struggled; but he was a man, and strong. Forcing the back of the hand that confined her two hands under her chin, he forced her head up and backward. Tightly she screwed up her mouth so that her lips were invisible. Once, twice and again he kissed her compressed mouth.

"There," he muttered, releasing her so abruptly that she almost fell out of the saddle and only saved herself by catching the saddle-horn with both hands. "There. I've heard you boasted that no man had ever kissed you. Well, you're kissed now and you won't forget it in a hurry."

She settled her toes in the stirrups and faced him, her body shaking. Her hat had fallen off, her copper-colored hair hung tousled about her ears. Violet eyes sparkling under the black eyebrows, lips drawn back revealing the white, even teeth—her features were a mask of rage—a rage that seethed and boiled in her passionate heart.

Never in her life had she been so despitefully used. Had she had a gun, she would have shot the man. But she did not have a gun—nor any other weapon. She had even dropped her quirt somewhere.

"Oh!" she cried, striking her fists together. "Oh! I could kill you! You dog! You beast! Faugh!" Here she wiped her mouth with the back of her hand and wiped her hand on her horse's mane. "When I get home," she raved on, "I'll try to wash the touch of your mouth off with soap, but I don't believe even ammonia will ever make my lips feel clean again!"

He laughed. She began to cry as her rage overflowed her heart.

"When I tell my father," she sobbed, "he will kill you!"

"Here, stop crying," he directed, stretching forth an arm and leaning toward her.

At that she came alive with startling suddenness and with a full-armed sweep scored his cheek with her finger nails from temple to jaw.

"Don't touch me!" she shrieked. "Don't touch me! When my father gets through with you——" She left the sentence unfinished and wheeled her horse.

But he was too quick for her and seized the bridle-rein and swung her mount back.

"Listen," he said, his voice quiet but his eyes ablaze, "don't say anything to your father."

"Afraid now, are you?" she taunted sneeringly.

"Not for me, for him. I don't want any trouble with your pa, not any. But if he jumps me, I'll have to defend myself. And you know your pa was never very quick on the draw, Sally Jane. So long."

He let her bridle go, and moved aside. She snatched her horse round with a jerk, and flew homeward at a gallop.

Chapter Two

A Safe Man

"WE GOTTA be careful," cautioned Tom Driver, the local justice of the peace.

"Careful is our middle name," Rafe Tuckleton said reassuringly.

"I know, I know," persisted Driver. "But yuh can't fool all the people all——"

"Abe Lincoln said it first," Felix Craft interrupted impatiently. "But he didn't live in Crocker County."

"Or he wouldn't have said it, huh?" flung in Tip O'Gorman. "Don't you fool yourself, Crafty. Tom's right. Human nature don't change any."

"I s'pose you mean give the people a square deal then," sneered Felix.

"If he does he's crazy," said a lanky citizen named Shindle.

O'Gorman grinned a wide Irish smile. "No, I ain't crazy, but we'll give 'em a square deal alla same."

"He *is* crazy," declared lank Shindle.

"A square deal," repeated O'Gorman. "A square deal—for us."

"I thought so," nodded plump Sam Larder, speaking for the first time since the beginning of the discussion. "A square deal—for us. Let's hear it, Tip."

O'Gorman sat back in his chair and crossed his legs. "When a dog is hungry it ain't sensible to feed him a whole juicy steak. He'll gobble it down, an' come pesterin' round for more in five minutes. But give him a bone and he'll gnaw and gnaw and be a satisfied dog for quite a long while."

"What kind of a bone were you figuring on giving our dog?" inquired Tom Driver.

"Sheriff." Thus Tip O'Gorman with finality.

Felix Craft shook a decided head.

"Guess again. Too much meat on that bone."

"Not if it's the right kind of meat," said O'Gorman blandly.

"Stop walking in the water," grunted the impatient Felix. "Say it right out."

"A sheriff with a ring in his nose," explained O'Gorman.

"A weak sister, huh?" put in Tom Driver.

"Or words to that effect," smiled O'Gorman. "Can't you see how it is, gents? To shove our ticket through we gotta give 'em one good man. If we don't, the four legislators are a stand-off. We may elect them. We may elect our three justices, county clerk and coroner. You can't tell what will happen to them. Folks will scratch their heads this election and they'll vote their own way. Take my word for it. And when it comes to sheriff, folks are gonna do more than scratch their heads. They're gonna think—hard. That's why we gotta give 'em a good man."

"One of themselves, for instance?" said plump Sam Larder, locking his hands over his paunch.

"Sure," O'Gorman drawled. "Do that. Give 'em somebody they trust and like for sheriff an' they'll be so busy thinkin' about electin' him that the rest of the ticket will slide in like a greased pig through a busted fence."

"To tell the truth, I'd more than half promised the job to Jack Murray," remarked Rafe Tuckleton, incidentally wondering why Jack had not yet turned up at the meeting. "He should have been here an hour ago."

"You half promised it to Jack Murray, huh?" exclaimed the lank citizen Shindle. "Lemme tell you that I was a damsight more than half counting on that job myself."

"Neither of your totals is the right answer, Skinny," explained O'Gorman pleasantly. "Nominatin' either you or Jack would gorm up the whole ticket."

"Aw, the party is strong enough to elect anybody!" protested Felix Craft.

"Not this year," contradicted O'Gorman. "You ain't been round like I have, Felix. I tell you I know. Gents, if we go ahead and nominate either Skinny Shindle or Jack Murray, we'll all have to go to work."

"WHO you got in mind?" queried Rafe Tuckleton.

"Bill Wingo."

Dead silence for a space. Then Rafe Tuckleton looked at Sam Larder and whistled lowly. Sam's eyes switched to Tip.

"I don't see the connection," said Sam Larder.

"Me either," concurred Rafe.

"I should say not," Shindle declared loudly.

"I'll tell you," said Tip O'Gorman, beaming impartially upon the assemblage. "Take Skinny Shindle. He——"

"Aw right, take me!" burst out the gentleman in question. "What about me! What——"

"Easy, easy," cautioned Tip O'Gorman, his smile a trifle fixed. "I ain't deaf in either ear, and besides ain't we all li'l friends together?"

"But you said——" Skinny tried again.

"I ain't said it yet," interrupted Tip, "but I'm going to—gimme a chance. It won't hurt. It's only the truth. Take Skinny and look at him. He buys scrip at three times the discount anybody else does, and there was a lot of talk about that beef contract the agent gave him."

"What of it? Folks don't have to bring

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scrip to me if they don't wanna, and suppose there was chatter about the contract. It's the government's funeral."

"It came near being the agent's," slipped in Sam Larder, with a reminiscent grin. "Some of them feather dusters like to chased him off the reservation when they saw the kind of cattle he gave 'em. I saw 'em. They were thinner than Skinny. No exaggeration. Absolutely."

"Well, that's all right, too," said Skinny. "A feller's got to make money somehow. Who ever heard of giving a Injun the best of it? Not in Crocker County anyway."

"That's all right again, too," declared Tip. "But that last deal with the agent was a li'l too raw. Taking that with your prices for scrip, Skinny, has made a heap of talk. You ain't a popular idol, Skinny, not by any means."

"Damn my popularity!" snarled the excellent Skinny. "I wanna be sheriff."

"Like the baby wants the soap," said Tip. "Well, you'll never be happy then, because you'll never get it."

"Lookit here, Tip——"

"You lookit here, Skinny," swiftly interjected Rafe Tuckleton. "Is this campaign your own private affair, or is it the party's?'

"The party's, I guess," Skinny reluctantly admitted. "But I want my share of it."

"You can have your share without being sheriff," Rafe told him. "You'll be taken care of, don't fret. This here's a case of united we stand, divided we tumble. Suppose any li'l thing upsets our plans, and our ticket don't go through? What then? What happens? For one thing you won't get the contract for furnishing the lumber for the new jail and town hall that's gonna be built next year. And for another, that land deal you and I put through last month will be investigated. How'd we like that, huh?"

"Rafe's right," said Tom Driver. "This is no time for taking any chances. It ain't a presidential year, and you can gamble there ain't gonna be a thing to take folks' eyes off the county politics. We've all gotta give up something for the sake of the party."

"I don't notice you givin' up anything," snapped the disgruntled Skinny. "I seem to be the only one that loses."

"And Jack Murray," supplemented Rafe Tuckleton. "Hell's bells, Skinny, why didn't you say something sooner? Tonight's the first I ever heard you even wanted an office. That's why I told Jack he could have it. He's a good man, but if I'd known——"

"WHAT difference does that make?" interrupted Skinny bitterly. "You couldn't give me the nomination anyway."

"You could have had another office—say county clerk."

"Wouldn't take it on a bet—not enough opportunity. Aw hell, it's a dead horse! Let it go, Rafe. Tip, you've had a lot to say about me, now let's hear what you got against Jack Murray."

"Yep," said Rafe Tuckleton, "let's have it. I'll have to give Jack some reason for going back on him, and I don't see exactly—" He did not complete the sentence.

"Speaking personal," observed Tip, again on the broad grin, "I ain't got a thing against Jack. Him and me get along fine. But when Jack was first deputy two years ago he managed to kill four men one time and another."

"That was in the line of duty," said Rafe. "They all resisted arrest."

Tip O'Gorman nodded. "I ain't denying it. And we've got Jack's word for it besides; but the four men all had friends, and when, as you know, each and every one of 'em turned out to be more or less innocent, why the friends got to talking round and saying Jack was too previous. Ain't you heard anything a-tall?"

"I've heard it said he was a *leetle* quicker than he maybe needed to be," conceded Rafe. "But folks always talk more or less about a killing. It didn't strike me there was enough in it to actually keep Jack from being elected."

"There is. They're only talking now, but nominate Jack and they'll begin to yell."

"YOU must have been mighty busy these last few weeks, Tip," sneered Skinny.

"I have," declared Tip. "Seems like I've talked with every voter in the county. I've gone over the whole field with a fine-tooth comb, and I tell you, gents, the bone for our dog is Bill Wingo. Most everybody likes Bill. He's a damsight more popular than the opposition candidate. Bill will get a lot of the other feller's votes, but if we put up anybody else the other feller will get a lot of ours—and so will the rest of his ticket."

Tip O'Gorman sat back in his chair and eyed his friends. It was obvious that the friends were of two minds. Rafe Tuckleton, his fingers drumming on the table, stared soberly at the floor.

"Are you sure, Tip," inquired Larder suddenly, "that Bill Wingo is the breed of horse that will *always* drink when you lead him to water?"

Tip O'Gorman nodded his guarantee of Mr. Wingo's pliability of character. "Bill is too easy-going and good-natured to do anything else."

"I'd always had an idea he was a good deal of a man," said Sam Larder.

"Oh, he'll stand the acid," Tip said. "He'll go after anybody he thinks he oughta go after; but if we can't manage to give him the right kind of thoughts we're no good."

"You needn't start losing flesh, Sam," slipped in Tom Driver. "Bill would never go back on his friends. He's just a big overgrown kid, that's all."

Rafe Tuckleton leaned back in his chair and stared dubiously at Tip O'Gorman. "All right for Bill, but how about Tom Walton?"

"I'll bite," Tip averred blandly. "How about him?"

"Nothing, oh, nothing a-tall. Only Tom Walton has been one too many round here for a long time."

"He does talk too much," admitted Tom Driver, his bright little eyes like those of an alert bird fixed on Rafe Tuckleton.

"He's a very suspicious man," said the latter. "He like to broke Simon Reelfoot's neck last week over a horse of his he said Simon rustled."

"Serve Simon right," said Tip promptly. "Simon's a polecat. Always was. Felt like breaking his neck more than once myself. Good for Walton."

"But Simon's one of our crowd," Rafe reminded him, "and he's been mighty useful. We gotta consider his feelings."

"Oh, damn his feelings. The old screw ain't got any right to feelings."

"Yes, but there wasn't any real actual proof about the horse—only some tracks in Simon's corral that Walton thought he recognized."

Tip quirked a quizzical mouth. "Between us, Rafe, what did Simon do with the horse?"

"Sold him to a prospector who was leaving the country. So it couldn't be traced."

"Good horse was it?"

"It was that chestnut young Hazel rides."

"Hazel's own pony? Lord! Man alive, Simon is worse'n a polecat. He's a whole family of them. Why couldn't he have rustled some other horse?"

"I ain't Simon, so I can't tell you," said Rafe dryly. "But if you don't want anything done on Simon's account, how about this· Yesterday one of my boys was shot at while he happened to be doing a li'l business on the Walton range."

"What did your boy happen to be doing?" smiled Tip.

Rafe attempted to excuse himself and his cowboy. "It was a long-ear."

"Branding it on the Walton range?"

"Yes."

"With its mammy?"

"Yes."

"Serve the boy right." Tip gave judgment. "You and your outfit are getting too reckless for any use, Rafe. The territory is not a Sunday-school. You can't pick a man's pocket openly any more. It isn't safe. And you know it isn't safe. Who was the boy and what time of day was it?"

"Ben Shanklin; and it was round noon."

"Worse and more of it. My Gawd, Rafe, you gimme a pain!"

Sam Larder shook a fat-cheeked head. "Dangerous, Rafe; dangerous. You've got to consider a man's feelings now more than you used to. Haven't you told your man to always work round sunrise and sunset, and never to shoot a calf's mammy on her owner's territory?"

"OTHERS do, and get away with it. Besides, he didn't shoot the cow."

"He might as well have shot her," declared Tom Driver. "He got caught, didn't he?"

"Ben didn't get caught. He made the riffle all right with two holes in his saddle-horn and one in his cantle that tore his pants."

"What range? Did he say?"

"About fourteen hundred."

"Fourteen hundred, huh? Then he couldn't have been recognized."

"Luckily not."

"Luck is the word—for you—for us."

"Wonder who did the shooting?"

"I don't know. Ben dug out one of the bullets from his horn. It was fifty caliber—a Sharps."

"That was Tom Walton himself," declared Tom Driver. "He's the only one in his outfit owning a Sharps, and he won't let any one else shoot it. 'Twas Tom Walton. And don't be so positive Ben wasn't recognized, Rafe. I hear Walton carries field-glasses now."

"He *is* getting suspicious," smiled Tip O'Gorman.

The smile stung the amiable Rafe. "He's gotta be stopped."

"How?" Thus Tip.

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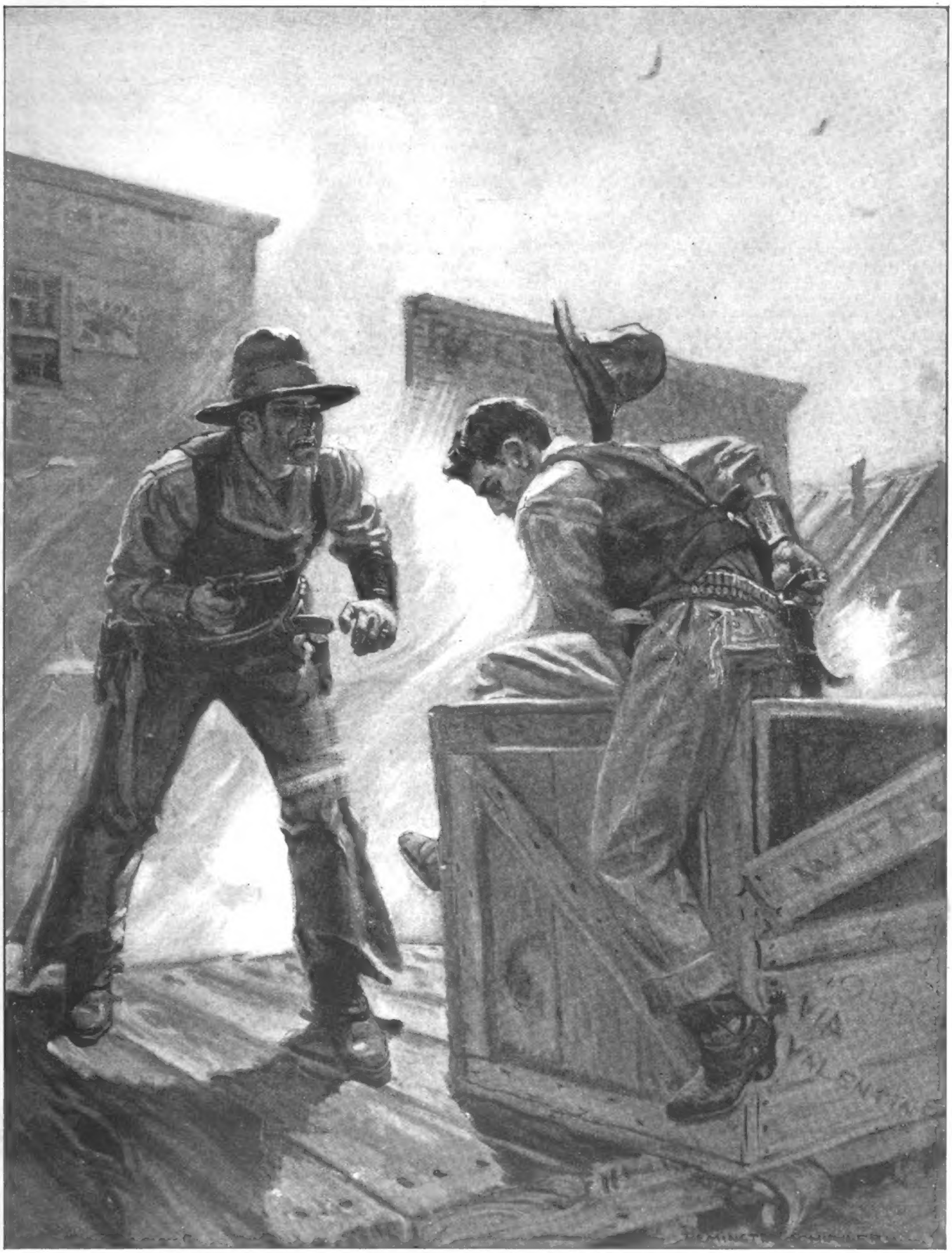

Followed movement so swift no eye could trace it. But Riley's gun caught. Jack Murray's didn't.

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"There are ways," snarled Rafe.

"Of course, but it doesn't pay to be too rough. Tom has a great many friends. We can't afford to stir up a whole kettleful of discontent. A little care, Rafe, is all that's necessary. I think I'd impress my men, if I were you, with the absolute necessity of being careful."

"I did tell 'em," said Rafe sullenly.

"Your telling seems to have left them cold. At least it left Ben Shanklin. Damn his soul! I almost wish Tom Walton had got him, the coyote! He deserves to be got, gorming up our plans thisaway."

"Well, everything turned out all right," Felix Craft tucked in hastily. "So why worry? I'm sure Rafe's men will be more careful after this."

"I wish I was sure," grunted Tip O'Gorman. "They're a wild bunch, every last one of 'em. I believe they just try to stir up trouble. They're eternally getting drunk and shooting up saloons and other places of business. People don't like it."

"Oh, boys will be boys," deprecated Rafe.

"Your boys will be dead boys if they don't watch out. Anyway, you put the hobbles on that Ben boy, Rafe. We can't afford to have him spoil things."

"How about having him spoil Walton?"

"And antagonize all of Walton's friends, huh? Bright, oh very!"

"If the feller who spoiled Walton was a stranger, it would be all right. You couldn't connect an absolute stranger with us, could you?"

'Let's hear your li'l plan," said Tip O'Gorman.

Every man of them listened intently to the Tuckletonian plan.

As plans go it was a good plan. Procuring an assassin to do the dirty work is always a good plan. Rafe knew a gunman, named Slike, in a neighboring territory. For two hundred and fifty dollars, according to Rafe, Dan Slike would murder almost any one. For five hundred it was any one, without the almost.

"Can he do it?" doubted Tom Driver.

"We all know how slow Tom Walton is on the draw," sneered Rafe. "Which he's slower than Sam Prescott. If Slike don't plug Walton three times before he can draw I'll eat my shirt."

"THAT sounds well," said Tip O'Gorman, eying Rafe with frank disgust. "But, somehow, I don't like the idea of having Walton killed."

"What'sa matter with you?" demanded the originator of the idea. "Losing your nerve?"

Tip O'Gorman's expression did not alter in the slightest. He gazed upon his questioner as if the latter was a new and interesting specimen of insect life.

"No," he said, "I don't think I'm losing my nerve. Do you think I'm losing my nerve, Rafe?"

Rafe looked upon Tip. Tip looked upon Rafe. The others held their respective breaths. In the room was dead silence.

"Do you, Rafe?" persisted Tip, his voice velvety smooth.

Rafe found his tongue. "No, I don't," he declared frankly. "But I don't see why you don't like my scheme."

"Don't you? I'll explain. Tom Walton's niece, Hazel, is the drawback. Rubbin' out Tom would most likely put a crimp in her, sort of. She lost her ma and pa only five years ago."

"Aw, the devil!" exclaimed Rafe Tuckleton. "We can't stop to think of all those li'l things. We're here to make money, no matter how. We ain't——"

"Good Night, Rafe!" interrupted Tip. "We ain't hiring any gunman to wipe out Tom Walton. I'm no he-angel—none of us are, I guess; but I've known Hazel since she was a li'l squaller, and I won't sit still and see her hurt. And that *goes*!"

Tip nodded with finality at Rafe Tuckleton. Rafe sat back on the middle of his spine and gnawed his lower lip. His eyes were sulky.

"I don't want to see Hazel hurt either," said Skinny Shindle with an indescribable leer, "but when it comes to a question of li'l Hazel or us, I'm for us every time."

"You look here, Skinny," said Tip O'Gorman in a low dispassionate voice, "what I said to Rafe, I say to you: Hands off Tom Walton."

"Oh, all right," said Skinny Shindle, "but if anything happens out of this, don't say I didn't tell you."

"I won't say so, Skinny," Tip said good-naturedly. "I won't say a word."

"Gentlemen," Felix Craft put in hurriedly, "let's go slow about now. No use saying anything hasty, not a bit of use. Tip's right. None of us want to hurt Hazel, and——"

"AND we want to be damn sure we don't want to hurt Hazel," interrupted Tip O'Gorman, his eyes fixed on Rafe Tuckleton's sullen face.

"'T'sall right, 't'sall right," said Rafe, forcing a smile. "Have it your own way, Tip. Tom Walton's safe for all of me."

"Good enough," Tip said heartily, shooting at Rafe a glance that was not completely trustful.

Entered then Jack Murray, wearing a set smile across his scratched face. He nodded to the assemblage, sat down jauntily on the edge of the table and brought out the makings.

"Well!" he said, his eyes on Rafe Tuckleton, rolling the while a meticulous cigaret. "Well, I suppose you've got the ticket all made up."

"Just about," nodded Rafe.

"What prize did I draw?"

"A large, round goose-egg," Skinny Shindle answered for Rafe with malice.

"Huh!" Thus Mr. Murray, the hand he had reached upward to his hatband coming down without the match. "You serious, Skinny?"

"I wish I thought I wasn't," was the reply.

Jack Murray turned a slow head back toward Rafe Tuckleton. "You told me the sheriff's job was mine," he said bluntly.

"I thought it was," admitted Rafe, looking straight into his eyes. "But we've heard some bad news, unexpected news. It seems you ain't as popular with our citizens as you might be. We understand that you're so little liked you wouldn't be elected in a million years."

"Who told you that?" Jack's tone was sharp.

"I did." Thus Tip O'Gorman in a tone no less sharp. "And I know what I'm talking about, you can gamble on that."

"Tip's had his ear to the ground pretty steady," said Rafe Tuckleton. "He knows what's on every voter's mind, and if we nominate you for sheriff it means the defeat of the party. Listen, and I'll explain the whole thing."

Jack Murray listened in silence. When Rafe said his last word, Jack Murray laid his unlighted cigaret across the end of his left index finger and teetered it slowly.

"Who you figurin' on running in my place," he drawled, his dark gaze on the cigaret.

"Bill Wingo."

The teetering stopped. The cigaret slipped into the fork of two fingers. The man slid to his feet.

"Bill Wingo," he repeated. "Bill Wingo, huh? Well, this *is* a surprise."

Without another word he left the room, closing the door behind him very gently.

When he had gone Tip O'Gorman threw a whimsical glance at Rafe Tuckleton.

"I'd feel better if he'd slammed that door," said Tip O'Gorman.

Chapter Three

What Sally Jane Thought

"CARELESS child," observed Bill Wingo, coming up on the porch where Sally Jane lay in the hammock. "You dropped your hat in the draw. I found it this morning. Here it is. Don't move, sweet one. Of course, if you asked me to sit down or didn't ask me I would, and if you felt like rustling some coffee and cake or lemonade and doughnuts, or even just a piece of pie with a bite of cheese on the side—just a bite, not over half a pound, I don't like cheese much—I wouldn't stop you."

"Stop calling me 'sweet one,'" Miss Prescott said crossly. "I'm not your sweet one, or anybody else's sweet one, and I'll get you something to fill your fat stomach, you lazy loafer, when I get good and ready. Not before."

"Well, all right," he murmured resignedly, settling down on the stout pine rail of the porch and fanning himself with his hat. "But I love you just the same. What's that? Did I hear you curse or something?"

"Something. I only said damn because you make me sick. Love, love, love, morning, noon and night! Don't men ever think of anything else?"

"Not when you're around," he told her.

"Oh, it's the very devil," admitted Sally Jane, rubbing her red mouth with a reflective forefinger. "Am I so alluring?"

"Who has been kissing you now?" he asked idly, and wondered why her face should flame at the word. Wondered—because everybody knew Sally Jane.

On her part she wondered if he had seen what had passed in the draw the day before, then decided instantly that he had not, else his manner toward her would have been decidedly different.

"You haven't answered my question?" he persisted still idly.

"Does it need one?"

"Well, no, not yet, anyway. When you're engaged to me I'll know who's kissing you."

"Don't be disgusting."

"No disgusting about it. I'll probably hug you, too."

"What dismal beasts men are," she, having regained control of her jumpy nerves, said with a mock shiver: "I suppose you'd enjoy having me sit on your knee."

"I would indeed," he told her warmly. "I think that chair there would hold the

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two of us if we sat quiet—fairly quiet."

It was at this juncture that her father, Sam Prescott, came out on the porch.

"Howdy, young Bill," said Sam. He invariably prefixed the adjective to Bill's name. Why, no one knew. It was doubtful if he knew himself.

" 'Lo, Sam," said young Bill.

"Sam," said Sally Jane from the hammock, "s'pose now a man tried to hug you, and kiss you and make you sit on his knee, what would you do?"

"If I was you, you mean?" inquired Sam judicially. Middle-aged though he was, he never ceased to experience a pleasurable thrill when his daughter called him "Sam." It reminded him so much of her mother. "If I was you," he went on, without waiting for an answer, "and the feller which tried to make me do all those things was young Bill here, I'd do 'em. I really believe he likes you, Sally Jane."

"YOU think so, do you?" sighed Sally Jane, smoothing her frock down over her ankles. "You too, Samuel? What chance has a poor girl got—without a club?"

"I told her if she married me," spoke up Bill, "she could have jam on Sundays and butter the rest of the week."

"There, you see, Sally Jane!" said Sam Prescott. "He'll be good and generous. And if you asked him for a new dress now and then or a pair of shoes I'll bet he wouldn't say no."

Sally Jane stubbornly shook her copper-colored head of hair. "Samuel," said she, "you're the only man I ever loved. Bill's all right in his futile thumb-handed way, but he's not my Sam. Now don't forget that one drink is enough for a plumpish man with a beautiful daughter, and that I want you to bring back a dozen cans of baking-powder, a dozen bars of May Rose soap, three dozen boxes of matches, four sacks of flour, sack of salt, sixty pounds of sugar, two papers of pins, four spools of number forty cotton and a pail of chocolate creams. Be sure and take the cover off and see it's a full pail, and if Nate tries to palm off any stale stuff or hard candy on you, why just throw it in his face and tell him I'll come in and complain in person my next trip."

"My word, Sally Jane," Sam exclaimed helplessly, "I can't remember all that!"

"I know you can't," said Sally Jane calmly. "I've merely been impressing it on you that there's a lot of errands for you to do. You'll find a carefully written list of everything I want stuck in the coil of the tie-rope under the seat of the buckboard. You can't miss it when you go to tie the team.

"And Sam," she added, raising her voice to a shout, for her father had already departed corralward, "be back by seven. I'm gonna make a lemon pie."

Her father waved a comprehending hand and disappeared behind the blacksmith shop.

"You see," said Billy Wingo, with a smirk of self-satisfaction, "the male parent approves. The last obstacle is removed. Be a sport. Take a chance. You might go farther and fare worse."

"I doubt it, William. Not that you aren't a nice boy and all that sort of thing. However, tell sister why you seek her company this morning?"

"Oh, yes, of course, sister not being a good excuse for coming, I did have another reason. I have a fresh bale of news for her li'l pink ear. Last night I was approached—" He paused dramatically.

"How much did he try to borrow?" Sally Jane inquired indifferently.

"Nothing like that, sweet one. The political steersmen of our fair county rode out to my place last night and——"

"What did the old thief want?" Sally Jane brutally wished to know.

"Steers*men*, beloved. There were two of him, and you do both old gentlemen an injustice. They——"

"So Tip came with Rafe, did he? And you mean to tell me you didn't even miss your watch after they'd gone? You didn't? They must be sick, the pair of them. What *did* they do?"

"Offered me the nomination for sheriff!"

Sally Jane sat up abruptly, stuck her finger in her mouth, then held it up to catch the vagrant breeze.

"The wind's still in the west," she said, making her eyes round as saucers. "And you are still sitting there as large as life, and I'm here alive and in my right mind!" Here she pinched her forearm. "That hurt," she added. "I really am not dreaming. They want you for sheriff, huh?"

"Don't 'huh' at me, Sally Jane. It ain't being done by the best people no more. And they want me for sheriff, really."

"I wonder just how much of that really is real?"

He wrinkled his forehead at her. "Sometimes, Sally Jane, you talk most awful puzzling."

"Those two old rascals!" she cried.

"Don't you think their intentions are honorable?"

Sally Jane's laughter was sardonic.

"Are they trying to fool me, or what?" he persisted.

"I don't know whether they're trying to fool you or not," was the reply, "but they're trying to fool somebody, that's a cinch."

"Do you know now, Sally Jane, I was thinking something like that myself."

She looked at him with a gleam of respect in her eyes. "I wonder if you really have a brain after all, William. Occasionally you give out a spark that leads one to believe that there may be a trace of reasoning power underneath your waving hair. What makes you think they have an ulterior motive?"

"HUMANLY speaking, I dunno why; but I do."

"Instinct is the white woman's burden, boy. You'd better leave it alone. But it doesn't take any instinct to tell me that there's a man and brother hiding in the cord-wood. To find the dark-hued gentleman—that is the question."

"Why take the trouble?"

"Why? Listen to the man! Why? So you'll know what you're up against, that's why."

"But I'm not up against anything," he objected mildly. "I told 'em I didn't want the job."

"What?"

He rubbed an outraged ear. "No need to deafen me," said he.

"Deafen you?" she cried. "I could take a club to you, you fat-head! The opportunity of a lifetime and you turn it down! Oh! I could shriek my head off with rage! I never was so hopping in my life! The first time an honest man is offered a political job in this county, for the honest man to turn up his nose, is——" Words failed her. She almost choked.

"So-o, so-o," he soothed. "Don't get so excited. Remember we are young but once, and every outburst brings us nearer the grave. I hadn't reached the end of my tale when you blew up and hit the ceiling. Lemme finish, that's a good child. I told 'em I didn't want the job; but they wouldn't take 'no' for an answer. They said for me to think it over, and they'd be back in a couple of days and take it up with me again."

"Bill," said Sally Jane, leaning forward, her violet eyes shining, "I'm serious."

"I'll try to believe it," he said, regarding her with admiration. "But just this minute you look like the most unserious thing I ever saw—and the most beautiful. Listen, Sally Jane, I wish you'd do as I ask you. Close your eyes and plunge right in. We'd be as happy as two pups in a basket. Sign on the dotted line and leave the rest to me."

Which nonsense she quite properly disregarded utterly. "Bill, I want you to take that nomination."

"BUT why, Sally Jane? I don't wanna be sheriff."

"Suppose I want you to?"

"But why should you want me to?"

"Isn't it enough that I ask it?"

"You flirt! You're utterly shameless! You know you can twist me all round your li'l pink finger like a piece of string. You know I'm fool enough to do anything you ask, and——"

"Well then, good fool," she smiled her interruption, "it's all settled. You accept the nomination, and if you don't make things hum after you're elected, you're not the man I take you for."

Bill slipped right off the porch rail and sat down limply on the floor. His eyeballs rolled up. His hand fluttered over his heart. He breathed with difficulty. "At last," he muttered. "Accepted! The shock will be the death of me! Water! Water! With a little whisky stirred in. Just a little. Not more than four or five fingers, or perhaps six. No sugar."

He got to his feet slowly and reseated himself on the rail. "You won't go back on your word, Sally Jane," he told her soberly.

"I can do lots of things you never heard of," said she. "But making two meanings grow where only one grew before is not one of them."

"Joking aside," he said, "will you marry me if I take this sheriff job?"

"Joking aside," said she, "would you want me for a reason like that?"

"Well, no," he admitted frankly. "I'd want you to love me a lot."

"I'd make a pretty worthless wife otherwise. Honestly, Bill, I like you a great deal, but there's something lacking. And when there's something lacking, there's nothing to be done. Love is the greatest thing in the world, Bill. It's what makes life worth living. And you mustn't cheat it. If you do, you might better never have been born."

He nodded. Try as he might, he was unable to feel very badly. He decided to give it up as a hopeless job.

"I see," he said gravely. "Sometimes, Sally Jane, I get an idea that maybe you and me won't marry each other after all.

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But no matter what happens, I'll always be a brother to you. You can count on me."

He arose and made her a flourishing bow.

"That," said Sally Jane with her bright smile, "takes a load off my heart. As a sister, I know I'd fill every requirement. Be a good brother now, and do as I ask. Be a sheriff."

"All right," said Billy Wingo. "I will."

Chapter Four

Hazel Walton

"NOW there," said Riley Tyler, staring at the driver of a buckboard who was tying her team in front of the Rocky Mountain store, "now there is a girl that is pretty as a li'l red wagon, new-painted."

Billy Wingo, unmoved, continued to whittle the end of the packing-case he was sharing with Tyler. He did not even look at the girl, and she was a very handsome girl.

"Yeah," said Billy Wingo.

"Not that I cotton to a female girl as a usual thing," resumed Riley, "ever since a experience I had when young. I'll tell you about it some time; maybe I better now."

"No, not now," Billy made haste to say; for he had heard the story of every single one of Tyler's love-affairs at least a dozen times. "Let's talk about somethin' pleasant. Try the weather."

"You know, just for that," trundled on Riley Tyler, "we'll go on talking about young Hazel Walton over there. Pity she's gone in the store. You've never taken a good look at her, have you?"

"Nor I don't want to," denied Billy with what seemed to Riley an unnecessary heat.

"Why not? Do your eyes good. Tell you, Bill, she's got the best-looking black hair y'ever saw."

"I saw her once or twice with her uncle," Billy admitted desperately. "She's all you say she is and more too. Anything to please the children. Don't you ever stop talkin', Riley?"

"Not when I got somethin' like Hazel to talk about," declared the relentless Riley, warming to his subject. "Y'oughta notice her eyes once, Bill. Tell you, you never saw *eyes* till you see hers. They're eyes, they are! Big and black and soft and eyewinkers long as a pony's. Fact. And she ain't lost a tooth. She's still got the whole thirty-four. You take my word for it, Bill, she's a whole lot different from other folks."

"She's two teeth different anyway. Most generally all other folks can crowd in their mouth are thirty-two."

"What's a tooth more or less between friends?" said the unabashed Riley. "She's got a whole mouthful, and when she smiles she shows 'em all."

"THAT'S great," yawned Billy, closing his pocket-knife with a click. "You forgot to say whether she's a good cook or not."

"She's a number one cook," Riley told him seriously. "Her coffee is coffee, lemme tell you, and she don't fry a steak to boot-leather neither. Not her. No. She broils it, she does. Y'oughta taste her mashed potatoes. No lumps in 'em or grit or nothin', only the mealy old potato; and butter beets!"

"Mixes 'em up with the potato, huh?"

"Of course not, you jack—separate. And canned peas—separate. Actually she cooks those peas so they're tender as fresh ones; tenderer, by gummy! Makes her own butter, too, in a churn."

"Well, well, in a churn. I never knew they made butter thataway."

"Shut up, Bill. You ain't got any soul. I stop at Walton's for a meal every chance I get. Y'oughta see her cookin' a meal, Bill. She rolls her sleeves up and she's got dimples in her elbows. She's a picture, and you can stick a pin in that."

"Why don't you marry the girl?'

"I've asked her," was the reply made without rancor. "She said, 'No thanks.' "

"That's one thing in her favor."

"Yeah, I think—Hey! what you tryin' to do, insult me?"

"Insult you, you tarrapin? You wouldn't know it if I did."

"If I wasn't so comfortable, I'd show you something," declared Riley Tyler, sliding farther down on the small of his long back. "But the heat has saved your life, William. Yeah, otherwise you'd be a corpse all bluggy in the middle of Main Street. I'm a wild wolf when I'm riled, you can gamble—Yonder she comes. She didn't stay long."

Billy dug the Tyler shortribs with a hard elbow. "Where's your manners? Go over and untie the lady's team."

"Too far. She'd have 'em untied by the time I got there. Besides I'm too comfortable. Another thing, I'd have to get up. No, no, I'll stay here."

Hazel Walton stepped into the buckboard, kicked the brake-lever, and swung her team like a workman. The tall near mule laid back his long ears and planted both hind feet on the dashboard. *Smack!*

(*Continued on page 84*)

Billy and Hazel came together literally. The girl seized his stirrup to save herself from falling, and burst into tears.

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Poor Men's Orchids

By Nalbro Bartley

ONCE again kindly Doctor Bellamy, old-fashioned country practitioner and modest hero of several of Miss Bartley's stories, is called upon to heal hurts beyond the reach of medicine. This time he ministers to the temperamental ills of two very lively and ultra-modern young people with advanced ideas of conduct. The old doctor's shrewdness and generosity are called into play in another humorous story, "Wise and Otherwise," which will appear in a later issue.

"A PANTHER in the waiting-room," Eccles announced, likewise enjoying the thrill, "Chérie by name!"

Doctor Bellamy's first thought was to wonder whether Eccles had absorbed the two quart bottles of champagne and one of rousing brandy which his modest cellar harbored. Then he whistled for Dammit to retreat under his chair.

"Jim Cooper and Thalie Bassett brought it," Eccles continued. "Between petting Chérie and making love, it is just as well no one else 'as dropped in."

The doctor rose, signaling Dammit to remain put. Rheumatic and wheezy if forced to move rapidly, Dammit was no fit playmate for a panther.

As it was after office hours, the doctor had retired to his "keeping-room" where gay old chintz and mellowed carpets, little round-backed chairs which had been his mother's, a towering walnut secretary and a dumpy rosewood tête-à-tête harmonized, strangely enough, with the alert-eyed ancestors framed in dull gold, an old flute and music-rack beside the square piano, and the endless shelves of endless books with a fat, yellow lamp as a dominating spot of color.

He opened the waiting-room door to see Jim Cooper, twenty-two and bereft of common sense according to his family, kissing Thalie Bassett, twenty and capable of adding charm to the loveliest of landscapes—while on their joint laps sprawled a yellowed-haired, almond-eyed panther of tender age.

"One more kiss to make up for the sugar shortage," Jim explained easily, grabbing at the escaping Chérie's self. For Dammit, unable to be considered passée, had followed the doctor and stood with hair perpendicular, wheezing fiercely.

"Chérie won't hurt him if you keep him away," Thalie defended. "It is ridiculous the way every one treats a five-months-old panther! They tell Jim to join a circus if he wants to keep her."

The doctor banished Dammit and proceeded to cross-examine the visitors.

"Chérie isn't thriving," Thalie began; "but perhaps you didn't know Jim had a panther?"

"I didn't know Jim was home. Howdy do, Jim—how does it seem to be back?"

"Mighty fine to see Thalie," Jim boasted, "but my own affairs are in a regular bran mash. It takes no Ouija board for Thalie and me to see we've outgrown the home town."

"I want the doctor to know we are engaged," Thalie interrupted.

"Isn't that splendid!" The doctor cast a nervous eye on Chérie, whose leash seemed too fragile for words. "I'm as pleased as I know every one else must be."

THERE was a pause during which Chérie struggled for freedom. Then Thalie confided:

"They are not pleased—if our long-hairs had their way, we would never see each other again."

"Too bad. Tell me the rest of Chérie's troubles."

"I got Chérie on the way home—you see, I détoured and visited second cousins in India. She is perfectly harmless, nothing to rave over—yet you'd think I had brought home a fleet of boa-constrictors. Thalie doesn't mind——"

"It's such a lark to have a baby panther," Thalie insisted.

"Only she is losing pep. The veterinary is afraid his trade in boarding cats will fall off if it is noised about he is treating a panther—so I brought her to you."

"I don't usually treat panthers except in human form—" the doctor's eyes twinkled—"but I appreciate your feelings. Were I you, I'd cure Chérie by a visit to the taxidermist. You would offend no one, yet always have her with you and as a door-stop she would be ideal. Otherwise ——"

"He's just the same," Thalie exclaimed, "and we thought he would be different. You have done so many queer things for such wicked people we thought you'd treat a little panther."

Jim rose with a swagger. "Oh, I'll bring Chérie back to form," he comforted, "don't worry. It strikes me the older generation are about as efficient as wooden Indian cigar-stands!"

Here Chérie made a lunge to divert Jim's attention.

"I'm not afraid of Chérie," declared the doctor, after she was under restraint, "but my trying to treat her would be as bad as an acrobat trying to sing. Better reconsider the suggestion for a door-stop——"

With a smile intended to be one of withering scorn, Jim gathered his pet in his arms.

Thalie grasped his arm. "Father!" She pointed out the window. "Whatever is he coming here for?"

"High blood pressure because of your engagement," Jim deduced. "I say—can we make a side exit? No use having a scene."

"*We* wouldn't stoop to a scene," Thalie said impressively. "To the drama morgue with them—but you know father's temper!"

An egg-shaped party otherwise known as Mr. Hugo Bassett was about to ring the bell.

Dammit was in the hall leading to the "keeping-room." To let Chérie have a word with Dammit on the way out might result in a scene despite any one's efforts. To let the egg-shaped party come upon the youngsters, to say nothing of the panther, would be equally dangerous.

Doctor Bellamy opened his laboratory door. "There is plenty of ether on the shelf," he advised, "in case Chérie is nervous."

Eccles had admitted the egg-shaped party, who sank into a chair and panted: "Fine to find you in," releasing an ominous growl from his vocal reservoir intended to be a sigh of relief. "Well, Bellamy, if I were a rich man or were prices and conditions normal and this social and industrial unrest quelled, I'd ship Thalie to Europe on the next steamer and swear out a warrant for Jim Cooper. They're engaged! Or else I'd give them my bank-roll and tell them to go to it. I can not do either and neither can the Coopers—being new poor and not ashamed of it. But both the mothers are nervous wrecks and Cooper and I are in line for apoplexy. What can you give me to buck me up?"

There was a rustle in the laboratory.

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The doctor was slightly cross-eyed, his usual prelude to telling a fib. "You've a constitution like an oak—all you need is golf and a diet."

"What time have I for golf? As for a diet—it is getting where we no longer say we are vegetarians but are plain hungry. Oh, for the good old days when a man could eat out loud for a quarter—eh? I'm being held up by my employees for more money, and when that lets up, the government holds me down for making any more. I don't see where we are fetching up. The wife is heartbroken over Thalie. I'm as patriotic as any man, but I've come to wish Jim Cooper had been obliged to stay in France—silently and permanently!"

The laboratory door squeaked, whereat the doctor hastily recommended corrective calisthenics.

"It is Thalie's nonsense," insisted the egg-shaped party.

"You object to Jim?"

"Not the old Jim, certainly not, a nice boy; and besides, that is Thalie's affair. But we all object to the immediate, maudlin marriage of a penniless, self-conceited stripling and a penniless, scandalous girl—we object to being dictated to by the pair of them, threatened, blamed, badgered—and I'm hanged if they don't hate us, think themselves misunderstood—" flourishing his handkerchief as excitedly as a woman.

"Not as bad as all that——"

"You've been on a month's vacation and know nothing about it. Jim came home and Thalie engaged herself to him without delay. A pretty ante-war romance. What was the natural outcome? Jim to return to college, his people willing to sacrifice to have him do so, finish his two years and become established; Thalie to wait, as her mother would have done or any sensible young woman would want to do, and in due time be married and have our blessings—and presents. But, no; they must marry on nothing a year and have everything. That is a telling angle of the new condition. And we new poor are expected to manage it somehow. I can't and I wouldn't if I could. I'll support Thalie until Jim marries her or she supports herself, and the Coopers will see Jim graduated, and that is all we are able or ought to do. Isn't that right and fair?"

Glancing nervously toward the laboratory door, the doctor murmured that on the face of it it certainly seemed to be right and fair.

"THEY don't think so. They have the flippant, dishonest attitude that today's young people have adopted—selfish disregard for elders; they shirk obligations or responsibilities, demand luxury, a continual hurrah! They consider themselves endowed with the wisdom to invade the old régime with a drastic hand. A boy like Jim can make apparently big money at unskilled labor—good enough. Ten years from now he will find himself unskilled and the big money somewhat diminished. Then he will be bitter because his people didn't 'make him' finish his education. 'Make him'—whew——"

A pause during which it seemed a porpoise was blowing air bubbles.

"Now Thalie strikes me as being as sensible as she is pretty," defended the doctor.

"Is she? My own flesh and blood, yet she spends half her time trying to decide whether her features are of the Ming dynasty, the Persian wars or the Victorian era and doing her hair accordingly—and the rest of her time she spends with Jim and the panther! Have you heard he brought home a panther?" (More air bubbles.)

"Do you think they want to work and save and wait? No, no need for it. They never intend to grub, to grow old—they want a four-room apartment where the work does itself, a high-powered motor with plenty of those how-do-they-do-it-for-a-dollar dinners! Entirely foreign to everything we have tried to teach them. We new poor are strangers with our children, and who is to blame and what is to be done and where are we going to fetch up?"

Doctor Bellamy was writing his prescription for calomel and sparring for time. He handed the slip of paper over with instructions as to diet and then said, slipping his old gold ring from one little finger to the other, indicative that his sympathies for the other fellow were roused: "Maybe all this is only signs of the times."

"THE other night my daughter went to an attic party—that is what they called it—with Jim," swept on the irate parent. "She went as a vampire, painted and powdered and undressed within an inch of her life. Jim went as a bum, an I. W. W. leader, his teeth blackened, dirty face, tousled hair, torn clothes—and the panther! And this is how he told of it: 'Last night I dragged my Jane to a shuffle and she shook her wicked hoof.'" (Here came a riot of air bubbles.)

Then he continued: "Whose fault is it? That is what I'd like to know. Why should a boy like Jim want nothing less than fifty a week to start with when he can't earn twenty honestly?"

"He couldn't support a wife on less," the doctor suggested.

"Gad, Bellamy, don't stand up for them!"

"I'm not—only he could not support a wife on less."

"He should not have a wife. Why can't they be engaged? Do you know what is breaking the wife's heart? Thalie's attitude. If we won't consent to a marriage by book and bell, she says she will have a contract marriage with Jim, a socialistic, devilish—I wish there were a few old-time convents handy—I'd—I'd—" He rose, rolling about the room in egg-shaped despair.

The doctor chuckled. "They're only talking," he warned, conscious of the laboratory occupants.

"I doubt it. Pretty talk, at any event. Wouldn't be so pretty if they made everlasting fools of themselves. The Coopers blame Thalie and we blame Jim and we all unite in wanting the panther shot at sunrise. Here—am I to take this stuff?" he side-tracked.

"Um. Meantime, while everything remains as high as the cat's back, the best thing to do about Thalie and Jim is to give your consent and let them try it—they won't try very far."

"Won't they? I'm not sure what lengths they'd go to. This is a new epoch, they claim, youth's heyday—everything is changing whether we old chaps like it or not, and they must be allowed to live their own lives."

"As long as they can do so without living off some one else—fine!"

"That's it. Now Jim thinks he should be made consul of Catalina Island or some other soft-springed ophidian job. Says he is entitled to it for being overseas. He is demoralized, shattered as regards ambition or concentration—and actual grit. Thalie is a woman to begin with—and in love and——"

"But her father's own daughter," championed the doctor; "a breezy top note of spring is Thalie and I am for her."

The egg-shaped party smiled benevolently. "Well, if I do say so——"

"After all," interrupted the doctor, "the problem the younger generation is putting up to us is—is ice-cream less nourishing than plain cream? For if not, do let us have ice-cream, it is so much more like a real party!"

"I condemn any such problem," growled Mr. Bassett.

"You should not. These youngsters with their shuffling Janes and nickel crawls and fisherman's drag, trying to hit on twelve cylinders and wanting fifty dollars a week for opening the morning's mail—they are poor men's orchids, that fetching yet common and harmless wild flower. We poor men have made them near-orchids, now we don't want to admit the crime. We have called it 'giving them what I never had' or 'sparing them this or that'—and the thing to do is not to take them any more seriously than one takes the wild flower. For, when it comes to a test, you'll find them quite as wholesome, nothing of the exotic hot-house variety."

This was a trifle too deep for the practical Mr. Bassett, who ran a successful hardware store.

"Better tell it to the wife," he urged, gathering his hat, "and persuade her to engage a regular laundress. What with breaking her heart over Thalie and breaking her back over wash-tubs, she is on the high road to life in a wheel-chair."

"I'LL drop around," promised the doctor, bustling him down the path before he realized what was being put over.

The laboratory was empty. An opened window indicated the means of escape and a note pinned to the table read:

> Yes, we will call it some consultation! If any one asks for us, please state that kind friends and jelly are still refused admittance.
>
> T. B. and J. C.

"Some people haven't as much perception as a turnip," the doctor confided to Dammit, after which he picked up his tattered copy of "Tom Jones at Oxford" and retired once more to the keeping-room.

Doctor Bellamy came upon an unexpected hornet's nest the next day when he dropped in to advise Mrs. Bassett that to do her own laundry work was as unreasonable as to expect a bargain sale of postage-stamps. He found Mr. and Mrs. James Cooper calling upon Mrs. Bassett to enjoy a recital of their worst suspicions.

There had been no indications from the front veranda that this was the case. The porch swing was occupied by Thalie, whose coiffure this day was susceptible to Egyptian influence, and whose white chiffon dress was fantastically combined with black oilcloth. She was gaily assembling a minor portion of her trousseau in the form of oval and diamond shaped handkerchiefs.

"Jim brought me the embroidery," she explained, the doctor feeling duty bound to admire the affairs. "Aren't they so

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"My heart's blood, children," the doctor repeated as he explained the whirlwind tactics he had adopted to bring a certain boy "out of it."

exquisitely embroidered you can fairly taste them?"

"I am here to testify," was the gallant response, "they most certainly are!"

"Mother is inside," she murmured, a mischievous smile in the wide-open brown eyes. "She is just teeming with comedy. In fact, every one clowns continuously these days—excepting father, and he acts so up-stage whenever he sees Jim that he ought to have a suit made out of a garden prop." She bit off her thread with a suggestion of vicious intent.

"Where is Jim?" The doctor was not opposed to lingering in Thalie's lavish, lighthearted presence.

"Thinking up ways and means to buy me a pedigreed limousine," was the flippant reply. "I'm considering going to one of those dancing classes where flappers skip about in simplest attire—the well-known burlap bag *alias* the Grecian costume. If Jim does go back to college and we do have a marriage contract, I can earn my living as a dancing demon——"

As Doctor Bellamy looked down at her, one felt the reasonableness of his past life, which perhaps accounted for his mild yet modern rebuke: "There's something more to success than looking well in evening clothes, Thalie," and he passed inside before she coaxed him into begging pardon.

He was greeted by Mrs. Bassett, who had always seemed to him to be possessed of two absorbing manias—the first, that of selecting her husband's stenographers, and second, of being a volunteer martyr to the art of painful housekeeping.

"Mr. and Mrs. Cooper are here," she began. "We were just speaking about you, too. Thalie dear, mama is going to be busy—don't interrupt us."

At which Thalie sang out sweetly: "Hand 'em a fast line of chatter, 'atta girl!"

Mrs. Bassett gave the doctor an appealing look. For once she forgot to exile Dammit to the back entry. Walking recklessly over her newly polished floors, she announced the doctor to the Coopers with a bromidic:

"Perhaps none of us can express it as we'd like to—but we all know what we think, doctor——"

Mr. Cooper, a harmless little auditor, who parted his hair in the middle, could not start the day aright without wearing a flower in his buttonhole and invariably said, "All right*ee*" and "Good night*ee*," rose and extended a limp hand.

Mrs. Cooper, who was only good-looking so long as she wore a hat, sank back in her chair with a wearied sigh.

"I'M AFRAID we frazzled parents are in line for a sanatorium," Mr. Cooper began with attempted playfulness. "We seem to have reached the end of our authority."

Doctor Bellamy sat on the edge of his chair and suddenly looked cross-eyed. "I can't think that of any of you," he fibbed.

"Just as adults used to make children admit naughtiness," Mrs. Cooper majestically stated, "so children put adults in the wrong. For twenty-five years Mr. Cooper and I have worked and saved—ever since Jim was born we planned for his education and future. You know that, doctor! Jim was willing and glad to cooperate and to do as we wished. When the war came, we gladly offered our boy to our country [business of handkerchief being pressed to eyes, etc.], and when he came back to us, later than most of the boys, at that, we planned on his spending his summer with us, resting and renewing old associations and returning to his university in the fall. At even greater sacrifice, due to the H. C. L., we were willing to see him through. When he became engaged to Thalie, we were no more opposed than the Bassetts. We approved of Thalie and I have every reason to believe they approved of Jim."

Brief nod of Mrs. Bassett's head, but hidden resentment toward the panther!

"But we did not and do not and will not countenance a marriage that will make Jim a common working man without a future. Nor can we condone a contract marriage such as Thalie, without shame or hesitation, has suggested."

"My daughter shall not marry a man who can not support her."

"Nor is she able to keep house for a man who can!"

"Deplorable but common situation," Mr. Cooper murmured. "Boys return with career shattered, girls want to be married, aftermath of war excitement and abnormal conditions, prices sky high, parents stony broke. All right*ee*—what's to be done?"

"They should do as we did—be engaged. Thalie can learn the things she should learn while Jim finishes his education. I don't expect them to wait after that. But this new—jazz," Mrs. Bassett admitted in spite of herself, "that young people try to make us dance to—I'll have none of it."

Doctor Bellamy wondered if no good fairy would summon him on the telephone. Confronted by three outraged parents, with memories of the egg-shaped party who had called yesterday, to say nothing of visions of Thalie sewing on her diamond and oval shaped handkerchiefs, and Jim dreaming of a pedigreed limousine as he gave Chérie a flea-bath, the doctor was not to be blamed for his first remark:

"Perhaps H. C. L. means Hard Conditions for Lovers, too."

"You don't approve this bolshevism youngsters adopt to gain their way?"

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demanded Mrs. Cooper, "this justifying dishonesty, immorality, goodness knows what else, this using power——"

"No, pep," corrected the doctor. "Pep is often mistaken for power—but you have to earn the latter and the former is part of youth's endowment. It is the natural and normal inclination of all young things to go through life on high gear. You had no motors in your day—it was horse-and-carriage conduct then and the high gear you remember and draw comparisons from was a much less violent affair."

"Do you think contract marriage the thing?"

"Giving up one's college career?"

"Why, my Thalie said only this morning that she wished for a champagne shampoo." Mrs. Bassett was almost in tears. "Fortunately, her poor father was not about."

"A champagne shampoo?" duetted the Coopers.

"Your Jim gave her the idea. He claims it is the rage in Paris. Thalie says if she marries Jim at a justice's of the peace, which is her idea of a solemn ceremony, she will have no wedding breakfast with its health to the bride, for she would much rather try a champagne shampoo and see if it would make her hair glisten! It is hard to have to tell this about your only child."

The horrified pause was broken by the doctor's chuckle.

Then he made his last effort on behalf of the younger generation. "Much of their talk is romantic bait. We often have to say spectacular, dramatic untruths in order to get the truth across. That is part of the transition, exaggerated threats and wild plans—you hear it to-day on all sides and from all sorts. It is like lovers walking down the street talking glibly of politics, weather, anything save the one sublime thing they are experiencing and are meant to express—love. Yet who is deceived by seeing them?"

The Coopers glanced at Mrs. Bassett to confirm what they had said prior to Doctor Bellamy's entrance: That while he had done much good (usual prelude to a criticism) he was too old to practise much longer; his antiquated methods, caustic advice and heroic sacrifices should cease.

"It used to be the mode to faint, have moonlight serenades and elope," the doctor went on. "Previous to that, damping muslin dresses to make them appear clinging was the proper caper. When a girl's shoe was no longer than a cavalier's cigar, she was a belle. Curlicue handwriting, underlined superlative vows of constancy and the quoting of poetry, pretended melancholy and despair at unrequited love all played a prominent part. Then what? They married and the man worked and the girl served and the home was consecrated. Did our elders condemn that form of prolog or romantic bait? If so, it mattered very little more than it matters now.

"THEY used to murmur, 'treasured sweet' and 'lady fair,' and now they howl, 'I'll tell the world she's a great kid' and 'Some pal is Thalie'—and it all means the same. They threatened to elope then—now they plan on Los Angeles and working for the movies. But nothing dreadful happens. The trouble is there are so few grown-up persons; we are children at heart and insist that the way we played at and around life is the only way to play. Besides, Jim has not found his civilian stride; he is to be excused for even Chérie. Being physically wounded wasn't the worst thing to happen to a lad. You can treat a bullet wound, but to heal a split personality requires considerable thought. Sometimes we don't realize that has happened. When Jim refused to talk of France, it was danger-signal enough. He is to be regarded as a man coming out from under ether, making shocking and vehement statements which he would deny and be ashamed of were he normal."

But this propaganda for the highly geared lovers was an utter failure. They still regarded Doctor Bellamy as the old dear who drove a horse and buggy and either gave calomel or homespun advice for every ailment under the sun.

So he departed and told Thalie, still working over the handkerchiefs, to ask Jim to come over the following Tuesday morning. Eccles wanted a day off and maybe Jim would substitute—as a great favor.

"I'll have him come," Thalie promised, "and I never shall forget the splendid things you told father. You seem to realize that Jim and I are independent souls entitled to individualistic interpretation of life." She was quite serious as she gave him due credit.

"I dunno," the doctor patted her head as he used to do when she wore scratchy gingham pinafores, "maybe I've recovered from my own form of softening of the brain and am sympathetic when the other fellow has succumbed to the same malady," and he drove off before Thalie could reply.

II

JIM took up his post as the noble Eccles's understudy at eight o'clock of a Tuesday morning. He brought Chérie along, an unhappy, tawny streak of wilted fur, and parked her safely out of Dammit's way. He had accepted the menial charge because Thalie declared he must; it would hurt the doctor's feelings should he refuse.

"I suppose he will pay me off with a nickel and some barley sugar," Jim had protested.

He treated the doctor with kindly patronage as his duties were outlined, informing him that he meant to obtain top money very shortly. A kit of burglars' tools looked a safer gamble to Jim than a diploma. Times had changed. He had as much right to be dishonest as the men who kept prices high and hopes low—and were called representative, public-spirited citizens. He wished no "back-stair" influence to wheedle justice out of moth-balled mentalities—not he. He hated to admit it, but his own people as well as Thalie's had evidently laid aside in kindly camphor any progressive ideas or broadmindedness. But Thalie and he would keep step with the new age. If the old age dubbed them criminals, outlaws—so on—let them rave on. He would not come any bloomers — but let no man question him too closely!

The doctor felt it his duty to murmur that that sort of talk was as futile as eating at the same restaurant as one's employer: it seldom got one anything.

"It is great dope, doc," Jim retorted. "You better kick in yourself."

"Thanks. Too much like the miners who put their wives to work while they ride around in autos agitating." Still, it did not seem to shock the doctor, for he calmly advised Jim to try a brand of infant's food for Chérie's lunch; it might prove just the tonic. Then he asked some details as to what happened overseas.

"If one mosquito could have spoiled the Garden of Eden," Jim said nervously, "how do you suppose I've anything pretty to recount?"

After this detailed travelog, the doctor left to make his morning calls and returned to find Thalie, in party costume, helping prepare the infant's food. She was not averse to accepting the doctor's invitation to stay for luncheon.

It was a versatile affair with the youngsters chattering unrestrainedly, Dammit wheezing underfoot because of Chérie's howling in the offing, and telephone calls for the doctor coming thick and fast.

"I'll borrow Thalie while I drive up to the Duncan farm," the doctor announced later. "Jim has extra harness to polish."

"Delighted," Thalie murmured.

Unabashed at disrupting plans for a romantic afternoon, the doctor jogged up a winding road lined with silver birches, Thalie using Dammit as a footstool.

The doctor broke silence by asking: "With food so high, how much do you suppose they'll ask us to pay for white forked lightning?"

"About as sensible as all the hue and cry," Thalie said with a superior air. "Jim is right—if we have new conditions, let us meet them and not cling to old tactics." Her wide-open brown eyes were tender and very much in earnest.

"Don't you think Jim is in a bad way?" the doctor questioned, "and you the logical one to get him out of it?"

"Don't say you agree with the long-hairs," she urged. "You seemed to understand. Jim is right; and whatever he thinks I think. We are one."

"Have you ever earned a dollar?" The doctor was apparently disconnected.

"Loads of them. In my sorority, I was the one who broke in new shoes and corsets —twenty-five cents a pair—and I rented my loveliest white silk sweater to Minnie Snell for fifty cents a week, and she was to pay the cleaner's bill. I made the sweetest little flowers from organdy and sold them——"

"I meant earned a dollar," he insisted.

"Don't you call that earning?" she demanded with indignation.

"YOU aren't to blame, after all, poor man's orchid," he rambled on.

"He *is* growing queer," Thalie thought in alarm.

"If you were to spend a year or so learning things which Jim will demand of his wife, once this first ardor has subsided, you could be his greatest helper. If you refuse the opportunity, you are apt to discover that people cry because they have done nothing but laugh."

The buggy halted before the farmhouse. The reins held loosely in her hands, Thalie sat dreaming off at soft white clouds with their brilliant sapphire background, wondering just what this queer-dear was trying to express. Could she ever possibly disagree with Jim? As long as Jim loved her and punctuated his statements with kisses, no Doctor Bellamy, no any one, could swerve her allegiance.

The doctor found Thalie in a pensive and slightly injured mood when he returned. So he argued no more; he saw

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she shared Jim's mental anesthetic and that she, too, must "come out of it." With his "twilight view of life," the doctor was the one to try to turn the trick.

There was no excuse for Thalie's returning to the doctor's house, although it was her wish and intention so to do. But when he drove to the Bassett curbstone, she was forced to be content.

THAT evening the doctor called Jim into his office to say in confidential tones: "Did you suspect I had you over for observation?"

"I'll say I didn't," Jim growled, feeling the day was one more wasted in the toils of the old régime.

"I'll tell you what I'm after." The doctor was so cross-eyed he could hardly gage where to reach for a chair. "I'm convinced you are a man of your word, that you are out for big money and not hampered by old-fashioned twaddle."

A trifle abashed, Jim pleaded guilty.

"Do you want to be let into a plan to give you Thalie and give Thalie everything under the canopy of Jupiter?" insisted the doctor.

"If you're a real one, let's talk." Jim had expected to be dismissed with the nickel and barley sugar.

"Is the sky your limit?" demanded the doctor mysteriously.

"Shoot," was the defiant reply.

"Ever thought about the vest-pockets of to-day?"

"I don't get you."

"Very few vest-pockets of to-day but what hanker to contain a prescription." The old man was hopelessly cross-eyed but determined to see the thing through.

"I guess that is so." Jim began to feel uneasy.

"I can write prescriptions—but I can't be my own advance agent. Do you see any connection?"

"You mean selling prescriptions for whisky? Oh, sir—" Unconsciously Jim adopted the "sir" instead of "doc."

"It is easier than robbing a bank."

"Yes, sir; but——"

"But what?"

"I never planned on just that—I never have touched the stuff."

"Good. Wouldn't want a man who did. Want a man of the world with modern notions. That is you, Jim, if I'm to believe you. Some one who does not consider his parents or their possible disgrace and who has no sentimental or emotional qualms. Only Thalie—and of course Thalie would agree in this—I can see that——"

"I don't think I'd want Thalie to know—this."

In danger of being permanently cross-eyed, the doctor shrugged his shoulders. "That is your affair. Women are weak, I don't deny. Now no one would suspect me——"

"That is just it——"

"Ah, that is just it," chorused the doctor, "my greatest safeguard, as you comprehend. Good! There is a champagne shipment I must dispose of—that will bring us tremendous profit. I plan to put you on a commission basis. Agreeable?"

"Yes, sir," he stammered, flushed with confusion.

"It means you can buy Thalie the pedigreed limousine and go hit the high spots."

"My folks would wonder——"

"But you are beyond them; you have plainly shown your common-sense, modern attitude—that is why I selected you. You are of the new age, not battling with conscience or old-style standards."

"Yes, sir, only they could not help but wonder——"

"Then tell them to hush up," the doctor solemnly instructed. "I'm going to give you an initial two quarts of champagne. I leave it to you to dispose of it for not less than thirty a bottle. You can take five dollars from each sale as your share. You can see how your income will soar. Wait—" laying a warning finger on his lips, he tiptoed from the room and into his cellar to where, in modest array, rested the two quarts of champagne and one of brandy. The doctor paused—yet no sacrifice was too great for the altar of love's young dream! He did save out the brandy—that would be taking his heart's blood, he told himself, the one comfort he was looking forward to at the age of ninety-nine!

Armed with the weapons, he returned to give them to Jim, apparently oblivious of the young man's mental distraction. Paying him a dollar for the day's work, as well as some cooking apples for his mother, the doctor wished him a veritable godspeed.

"We'll be millionaires yet," he whispered, letting him out the side way. "Mum's the word—in more ways than one."

"Yes—sir," Jim chattered helplessly, as if the doctor had placed a victim's body in his arms and bade him bury it without delay.

Somehow he could not see Thalie that night. Strange this should so shock him. He would rather not have seen Doctor Bellamy's clay toes. So this was the town's patron saint, the man every one told their troubles to and had asked advice of for more years than Jim could remember, this gentle, kindly old chap who professed to love all living things, the same doctor who had set Jim's fractured leg when he fell off the hay-rick and had taken him to a Wild-West show as a reward for getting well. So his spirited defense of Jim and Thalie was to win the latter to aid in an underworld liquor ring.

HOW beastly cheap! Booming memories of the other side began to fade in earnest as this new and more personal problem presented itself. With the fading of the memories faded the drastic plans for rebellion. He walked on in the dusk, dragging the unwilling Chérie behind. Chérie seemed a spectacular bit of nonsense, just as his own claptrap phrases seemed when repeated to him by the doctor. All it amounted to was that Doctor Bellamy was dishonest and he wanted Jim to be dishonest as well. As for telling any of this to Thalie—he would cut off his right hand before she should know.

The guilty package was heavy and Jim's arm ached. Thalie would wonder where he was; he must telephone her an excuse—first, he must hide the wine.

He made his way to Chérie's woodshed boudoir and placed the carton of wine underneath Chérie's straw nest. No one would be likely to look there. In the morning he would return it to the doctor. It was a terrible situation—he felt he could no longer trust his own father and mother or even Thalie if the doctor proved such an astonishing hypocrite.

Then he succeeded in convincing Thalie he was too tired to see her, but loved her just the same. He listened to his mother's praise of the apples and his father's amiable "Good night*ee*, Jim"—his mind running on something like this:

"A fat lot they know what he really is. I guess my mother and father would have him run out of town. If they looked under Chérie's bed to-night, maybe they'd have me run out, too. I can only depend on myself, that is one sure thing—and believe you me, Jim Cooper, you shall not dabble in stuff like this. Not much!"

III

IT WAS seven when Thalie made a veritable sun-goddess appearance in the Cooper back yard, taking Mrs. Cooper by surprise.

"Jim is not up," his mother announced, disappointed she could not add it was because he had spent the previous evening with Thalie.

"That is why I came. I want to borrow Chérie if you don't mind."

"You know my sentiments," her future mother-in-law replied, gazing upon her with a keen, appraising eye.

"I want to surprise Jim—I've made Chérie a wonderful sweater."

With more pity than anger, Mrs. Cooper articulated something to the effect that she wished to be considered out of it. Then she added: "I must wash my dishes and make some pies—I suppose your mother is doing about the same thing," pausing to let Thalie draw guilty comparisons between such thrift and industry and the borrowing of a panther to fit with a newly completed sweater!

Unaware of the scorn, Thalie blew Mrs. Cooper a kiss—and one in the direction of Jim's shaded window—and skipped gaily to the woodshed, where, to put it mildly, Chérie had passed a most lumpy night. Leashing the snarling panther, she spied something buried in the straw.

Unearthing the plunder, she demanded: "Chérie, did he put this here?"

Chérie gave a telling snarl. Thalie tiptoed to close the woodshed door. The Coopers were white-ribboners—Jim had never touched alcohol—the wine was priceless. Why had he hidden two quarts in Chérie's nest?

After her first surprise, her "woman's intuition" caused her to feel dazed as questionable memories of Jim's plan to make top money and come no bloomers presented themselves. He was not going to return to college and grub—not he. They were to marry and have the best, never mind how—leave that to him! He had been so brave and wonderful about it—and mysterious, too. She was told not to give it a second thought.

She peeked through the door to see if any one was astir. She must destroy the stuff before Jim had a chance to sell his very soul—or his people to know. It was tragic, Thalie told Chérie. Jim had done this for her—an illicit-liquor trader in order to give her rings for her fingers, bells for her toes and so on, turning the poor man's orchid into the hot-house variety. Her own fault . . . her heart thumped with guilt as she rewrapped the wine and cast about for an idea of what to do with it.

Had she said, "Go back to college, Jim;

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The egg-shaped party sank into a chair and panted: "Fine to find you in," releasing an ominous growl from his vocal reservoir intended to be a sigh of relief.

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we are awfully young and we can wait while we learn—and everything—" well, Jim would have gone back!

There was no one's shoulder to cry out her confession upon except Chérie's—and that shoulder was as uncertain as a dud.

Mrs. Cooper might call Jim and he might come upon Thalie and there would be a scene. His mother would blame her and telephone her mother and both fathers would be summoned and it would be *awfull* How very unattractive was sin, Thalie confided to the panther.

Old standards and morals were like old slippers warming at the hearth and mighty good to fall back upon.

She wished she knew how to bring about spontaneous combustion as regarded the wine, to defy revenue officers and Jim—for she must dispose of it in some perfectly legal way!

With the deadly plunder under her arm she scurried down the back lane, Chérie lagging behind. She must not go too far away, for Chérie might take "notions," yet she must go where no one could see her dispose of the stuff. Then she must confront Jim and tell him she knew all.

No poor man's orchid can be expected to play true to tragedy all along the line. The most critical situation may be ethically handled, with humorous delight to soften the tenseness. So, suppose she treated herself to a champagne shampoo? What finer use could it be put to? What revenue agent could accuse her of drinking or wasting it? It was her only chance of a champagne shampoo and Jim had said she ought to have one. Poor, guilty Jim, who needed to grow up as every one planned on his doing. Thalie justified her resolve still further by thinking that she was only doing her duty—flying along the back lane with the neighbors looking out to exclaim:

"Thalie and that panther of Jim Cooper's—has she lost all her reason?"

As far as her mother and Chérie were concerned, no distance was too great for the former as regarded the latter. One view of Chérie struggling to détour from the garage to the chicken-pen caused her mother to retreat to the attic.

With tears and laughs struggling for equal recognition, Thalie let the first quart give a stimulating pop, at which Chérie attempted to walk on the ceiling. The glittering grape lent Thalie courage. Pop went the second quart and smash-bang went the bottles into the rubbish heap.

DOWN came a twenty-three-inch braid of fern-brown hair with unexpected gold glints quite equal to the wine's sparkle. While Chérie stood by as witness, Thalie slipped into the house for towels and a brush, preparatory to burying her wilful, worried young head in the wine after the fashion of Parisian beauties.

It would be mighty good sport, after all, she decided as she came slipping back. But she was just in time to view Chérie, goaded on by the insult of being fed infants' food, on tiptoes, lapping the last of Jim's plunder!

"Oh, dear," cried Thalie, "whatever shall I do with an intoxicated panther?"

Chérie swayed groggily, her tongue lapping either side of her mouth. She let forth a telling scream and sank in a befuddled heap, as if to say, "It has finished me—but it was worth it."

Jim was in the doorway. "Mother said," he began, staring at Thalie's disordered hair and the silent panther, "I'd find——"

"No evidence any one can find," Thalie assured him, "but how could you, Jim? Why did you?"

"I knew you'd found the stuff and I felt as guilty as if I'd really tried to sell it," he admitted, "but your hair, Thalie——"

"It was to be a wonderful champagne shampoo, make my hair sparkle like sunbeams for days," admitted the poor man's orchid coquettishly, "only Chérie drank it up while I ran in for towels."

"You were going to use it for a shampoo and Chérie—" he dropped beside the panther.

"She's dead!" he exclaimed, visibly relieved.

Thalie knelt beside him. She put her hands on his shoulders while she made a girlish little appeal with something of her father's determination behind the girlishness. She had been wrong to encourage Jim in the way he should not go and their people were right: better return to college and enjoy a two-year courtship than—this!

"I REALIZED the minute he offered it," Jim admitted, his face as solemn as Thalie's. "I saw it was hot air I'd been shooting, as much as anything to be rid of the rumbling things I'd think about—that happened when I was over there. I made you take me seriously, didn't I? But when it came to a show-down—why, Thalie, I felt like coming in to the folks and promising them to go back to wearing knee pants if they liked!"

"How long have you been doing this?" She felt she must know the worst.

"He gave me the stuff last night when he paid me, the old blackguard, and every one thinking him a saint. Said he had tried me out to see the sort I was and that I suited the requirements—isn't it beastly to think he is that sort? He took my raving seriously—and it had showed him up. I wasn't really serious—neither were you—were you, Thalie—it was——"

They both suffered from intellectual lockjaw, needing the "old blackguard" to supply the fitting phrase.

"But it isn't—it isn't," Thalie persisted.

"It is—Doctor Bellamy."

When Thalie's hair was smooth and Chérie tenderly wrapped in the new sweater, there went to Doctor Bellamy's two chaste young Puritans with scant mercy for one so wayward and debased. For the sake of their families they would not expose him publicly—jail for one of advanced years must not be thought of. Having confessed, he could leave the community and all would be forgotten if not forgiven.

Eccles wondered at Chérie's absence as he bade them join the doctor at breakfast. They refused to share his grapefruit and gazed upon him with the uncharitable eyes of disillusioned youth. He wondered if his offering of wine had been for naught—had they gone and got married in spite of every one?

"Chérie has just died," Thalie began with telling emphasis, "from drinking two quarts of champagne."

"Happy end," said the doctor lightly.

"Thalie was going to shampoo her hair in it because she wanted to save me from disgrace," Jim continued.

"And we have come here to tell you we condemn you and despise you," finished Thalie. "How can you be so when every one believes in you, how dare you try to make Jim a—a—thief?"

"Softly! Jim sought an opportunity for 'top money,' said he had the right to snatch from the universe whatever he saw fit—and marry you."

"He didn't really mean it——"

"How could he have done this unless he stooped to such things as——"

"But he did not mean it," Thalie reiterated, "and it is you who must be punished—you who dupe the town——"

"Ah, I am punished." The doctor shook his head. "Come view the empty treasure-trove."

With an arm about each of them he guided the way to the cellar, where they steeled themselves to gaze upon the harbored cargo. On the shelf were two dusty, telltale circles which showed where yesterday's offering had rested. Beside them was the brandy bottle, "My heart's blood, children," the doctor repeated as he explained the whirlwind tactics he had adopted to bring a certain boy "out of it."

"You mean," said Jim, having taken in the rows of jelly and preserve glasses the innocent old cellar harbored, "you were testing me——"

"I don't care what you call it." The doctor was a trifle irritable. "I know I'm the loser!"

They reclimbed the stairs feeling so utterly crestfallen there was not even a minstrel gag to adequately describe it.

"What was to be my dénouement—tar and feathers, a hemp picnic?" questioned the doctor upon resuming his grapefruit.

"Never speak of it again—to any one," they begged.

"A go," he agreed lightly, "and you will remember that I told you at the outset what an ideal door-stop Chérie would make."

AFTER the children left, nice, trembly young things with every sane intention they ought to have, besides a wholesome portion of chagrin, the doctor went to his keeping-room to unlock a drawer of the towering black secretary.

He was smiling in amused fashion and he continued to smile as he drew from an old box the miniature of a girl in a quaint striped taffeta gown. But his smile changed to one of grave tenderness, characteristic of a long-ago, bravely borne sorrow.

"We didn't have panthers and champagne shampoos in our day, did we, Jean?" he whispered, "but the caring was just the same!"

Laying the miniature aside, the doctor sought out his shiny topper, his medicine-bags, his dog Dammit and went out to where Home Rule and the buggy stood in waiting.

While Home Rule reluctantly started on her morning's journey the doctor thought again of the battle raging between poor men's orchids and the new poor.

Would the old or the new platform triumph he wondered—Dammit's grizzled color supplying an inspiration.

"Is the zebra a white animal with black stripes or a black animal with white stripes?" he demanded of himself. "Answer me that and I'll answer the other!"

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The God of the Green Gulf

By George F. Worts

THAT rare fiction treasure—a sea story with plenty of wind and weather and real salt water—is Mr. Worts's contribution from the typhoon-swept Java gulf. Following the abduction of a beautiful and unconventional heroine, there is an eventful voyage for the crew of the *Gladiator*. The same author's "F. O. B. Cambodia," a story of business adventure in the jungle, will appear in an early issue.

THE *Gladiator* lay at anchor in the roadstead off Singapore between the South Mole and Tanjong-Ru. It was a soft and luring night, scented by a warm wind from over the Strait of Jahore, a million wavelets lapping up and dispensing in shimmering beats the intimate brilliance of low-hanging stars and the snowy light of a moon in the third quarter. The twenty constellations of the town flung in a bold sweep to right and left, far as the eye could see, stirred to life bitter-sweet recollections in the heart of Captain Don Lazarro.

For the first time since he had purchased the little steamer, he permitted his belief in Chance and Faith and self to stagger; the tides of despair, dammed back by his conquering resolution, threatened to rush in and engulf him. He had reached the ebb-mark of his fortunes, having contracted to carry a handful of Swatow coolies from Singapore to Christmas Island.

In appearance Don Lazarro was eminently suited to the fierce coastal environment—a gorilla of a man, all shoulders and arms, strong as an ox, with wide-set, tourmalin eyes, full, red lips, a mighty neck—a caricature of passion. His eyebrows won more than one fight for him before he even entered it. They were tufts of black fur, and the hair, rolling and tumbling back from his beef-red forehead, was black, and rank also. One was conscious of the fires burning in the fellow, could not help wondering what furies were poured forth when this crater on legs erupted. An eager hitching together of the tufty brows was a perpetual characteristic; but his gaze was not quizzical, it was hunting. Black dissatisfaction had been born in Don Lazarro since a night long ago in the settlement on Papeete—a woman and a bad woman.

HE SHUT the door on the mahogany and green richness of his cabin and went to the rail for a look at the night. A sensuous breeze flowed past his cheek. The melody of a far-off hotel orchestra droned over the twinkling water to his ears. The sensation of his aloneness came over him with a tidal rush. His heart seemed to ache with the bitterness of a great loss, and his nails were biting into his palms.

Memory was playing him tricks to-night—the silky moon and the spiced wind, the drooping palms along the white beach, the shower of gilt and green sparkling along the water-front, the warm pulsation of a violoncello in the tropic hush. All these carried him back irresistibly to a night on a schooner when, a young sea-gipsy, he had received his first glimpse of Papeete—and the frightened girl who had gulped absinth with the Frenchman—a day and a day of futile adoration.

A *prau* came swimming down the iridescent path of the declining moon; and Don Lazarro called dully in Malay. The night had a virginal quality—something young, unspoiled, tender—as it had been when the snapped string of a wailing fiddle brought his heart into his throat and lured him ashore in Papeete to the shrine of the little Portuguese beauty.

Don Lazarro slid down a rope into the 'thwartship seat of the native boat.

He walked down Connaught Drive to Beach Road, walked rapidly, with a cigar clenched viciously between his teeth, his eyes vacant, his thoughts three thousand miles away in the southern islands. At Brah-Basah Road he cut north, pushing his way through swimming faces of yellow and brown and black. Lanes were opened for him.

A Brunei *gong-gong* thrummed in his ears; notes struck from a *biwa* wrapped him around like strings of tinsel sound. A woman in scarlet satin pajamas rushed out from a doorway to breathe an invitation and the strange breath of hasheesh into his face, her bare arms moving and beckoning like two white serpents. Don Lazarro struck her roughly aside—and she screamed insults in Malay, in Javanese and in bastard English, until the grinning crowd swallowed him again. It was not for him to know that she was the queen of a day.

A street fight—a Chittie and a Parsee—distracted him momentarily, but he forged on through the gathering spectators, the yelpings of the combatants drowned by the lusty chantey of four sailors from a British man-o'-war who marched abreast with arms linked down the middle of the road.

Don Lazarro was probably the only auditor, the only witness, who refrained from grinning. Yet the lurid lanterns, the barbaric music, the jostling crowd, the painted, leering women, the rolling waves of scented heat, the thrill of excitement which buzzed down the endless street, were what he had come to find—sense-contact with material things. The pinching together of his tufty brows began to relax slightly; his eyes lost a little of their baleful squint, and his tense lips slackened. He continued to wander aimlessly on, as though his steps were timed by the drum-beat of some lurid dream, accepting impressions only at random and vaguely, with his fingers strapping the wrists behind his back, his head sunk low.

A soft blaze of rosy-golden light above a high stone wall attracted his curiosity. The wall, made black by the dearth of illumination on the street side, ran stiffly to the next corner and ended abruptly in its right-angled turn.

AN ARCHED gateway drank in and spit forth irregular streams of mixed humanity, tapping and feeding the currents in the densely packed street. This portion of the road had become a thicket of human beings. Rickshaws and *gharries* were jammed against the opposite wall; people were arriving afoot and awheel, debouching into the hot silent mass, from which the arched gateway continued to drain a thin trickle of human particles, like mackerel slipping from a packed school into an inviting eddy.

A tenseness was in the air, and a curious breathless silence. The radiant glow within the wall brightened, became smoothly a golden glare. Waxy smoke was rising from it. Matches were hissing; in the distance a man chanted in a deadly monotone.

Don Lazarro, made momentarily forgetful by the bewitched something he breathed in the very atmosphere, pushed into the human current and entered the inclosure.

A rippling sea of candle-light met his eyes—thousands and thousands of candles held in the hands of a silent, sinister multitude—a pack squared by the horizons of the three walls and a looming spired building.

The candles were inches thick and feet long, sputtering and fuming in fat bundles in the hands of these silent people, all turned toward the building, as if waiting.

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He was not connectedly thinking of the sagging, soft weight in his arms, for he had made a sublime discovery.

A great, greasy cloud of black vapor rose up toward the stars.

It was the strangest assemblage Don Lazarro had ever gazed upon—white, yellow and black men, in *sarongs*, *panungs* and the stiff garments of the Occident, bare-headed and turbaned; women with chalked cheeks and painted lips, brilliant in satin and silk and cotton, green and red and yellow. There were half-castes and Malays, Chinese and Javanese, Hindus and Japs and Sarawak Dyaks—all the types of the Orient packed into this square compound.

The doors of the cathedral opened. A teakwood bier supporting a papier-mâché effigy of Christ upheld by the shoulders of six young Eurasians appeared in the gloomy opening.

Good Friday!

Don Lazarro choked when the blood swelled up and hammered in his throat. But the emotion was far from spiritual. The Fates, he felt, were playing with him. Dwindling down through these half-breeds since a century ago was the blood of Portuguese pioneers—the same blood, Americanized, that hammered in his own throat, handed down to him from men who bravely set forth to open new routes to Ind and Cathay, believing that the sea would eventually come to an end and drop them off into dizzy space. A coincidence was an omen; whether this one was for good or for evil Don Lazarro wished he might know.

The thousands of rippling candles swayed phenomenally, then bowed as one, and sank—an ocean of undulating golden light. The worshipers had gone to their knees. And of all that polyglot assemblage Don Lazarro alone remained standing, helpless and numb in the grip of tremendous feeling.

HE BLUNDERED out of the opening lane as the bier approached; and a little white-faced Chinese girl, crusted with diamonds and rustling with stiff silk, devoutly knelt in the place he made, her slanting bead eyes a-glitter with fear, her carmine lips bubbling some mystic prayer.

Don Lazarro fled through the arched gateway in a panic, elbowing his way fiercely, shivering when he reached the street as though he had been showered with ice-water, and oppressed by an unaccountable sense of foreboding.

A wave of heated air drifted down the road, spiced with stale incense and the breath of an unusual perfume, and with it drifted back to him his earlier hallucination that he was in Papeete—a dozen years ago.

And as he gained the street a woman came stumbling and reeling out of the night toward him. Her black hair was flying wildly. Her hands were clenched, her arms stretched ahead of her as if to ward off bodily contacts, her gestures like those of *La Sonnambula*.

A crack in the stone wall emitted a sooty beam of candle-light which struck her face and powdered it a ghastly white. She wore a cheap cotton kimono of basalt-blue; the sleeves flapped as she stumbled. Her small, white feet were thrust into grass-paper sandals with red-leather straps. One of these came free and stayed in the dust as she collided with Don Lazarro.

He would have pushed her away uncermoniously and left her to a decidedly uncertain fate, had it not been for that chink in the wall and the odor of her breath panting up into his face as she clutched at him and swayed.

The candle-light flicking over her bloodless face, and the sickening puffs of absinth shocked his own breath out of his body. He was not connectedly thinking of the sagging, soft weight in his arms, the drooling plea from the woman's moist lips; for he had made a sublime discovery, a counterpart to the reenactment of the miracle on the other side of the wall—not of the Holy Lands, but of unholy Papeete on a night a dozen years ago.

Don Lazarro lifted her into a double-rickshaw, and she relaxed into heavy, sodden slumber before they reached the water-front. He took her out to the ship in a *sampan*, carried her to his cabin and

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deposited her on the broad, white bunk, folding her wasted hands across her breast.

Only a little remained of the girl's formerly striking beauty—the milk-white skin, the peaked brows, the soft masses of shining black hair. Her lips were tightly closed, sullen, coarse, cruel. It was a sinister profile, bleak and bitter and vicious—the kind that made you involuntarily shiver.

Don Lazarro studied the face with tenderness indescribable—and with immeasurable satisfaction.

He rang for a boy, and when warm water was fetched in a basin, he bathed her hands, her face and feet with a huge yellow sponge. Her expression softened while he was ministering to her—and the odor of absinth and musk reeked in the room.

Don Lazarro adjusted the electric fan so that the breeze would disturb the air above her, drew a white, downy blanket up under her chin, opened each of the port-holes, turned off the lights and left her. He locked the door and pocketed the key. Within the hour the *Gladiator* was under way, slipping out under the moon into the Java Sea.

By midmorning of the next day the crew of the *Gladiator* became acutely aware that a woman was on board contrary to her wishes. It was a quiet, sultry morning, and the sea was a flawless sapphire.

Don Lazarro was standing near the starboard rail on the bridge, gazing pensively at the orange lateen sails of fishing junks near the islands, when notices of reckless destruction were dispatched from the precincts of his cabin. He did not turn. His shoulders went up and down almost imperceptibly, like the shoulders of a steamer when a lazy ground-swell passes underneath her.

He heard the crash of a water-carafe, the splintering of wood, the shriek of rending cloth. Was it the bed-clothing? He wondered. The port-hole coverings?

The man at the wheel vibrated his head on his thin neck as if an icy finger had been run along his spine when a scream below them reached an exquisitely high note and huskily stopped, as though it had turned into steam. He looked at the captain, but the captain was idly considering the orange lateen sails.

THE commotion stopped as abruptly as it had commenced, and the warm silence of the morning seemed to rush in upon them, as air rushes in to fill a vacuum. The chuffing of the engine, the measured creaking of woodwork, the hissing of the cleaved water, and the gentle humming of the wind, were the only sounds to be heard.

Don Lazarro, with his furry brows all but meeting above his nose, muttered an order regarding the course and went below without seeming haste.

The first mate, who had been stiffened like a ramrod against a stanchion during the ordeal, stared at him hypnotically until his tawny pith helmet disappeared below the deck level. Then he puffed out his cheeks and closed his eyes.

Don Lazarro unlocked his cabin door, went inside, and closed it after him.

The girl was sitting on the floor, the central object of his despoiled possessions. Not a picture or a chart remained upon the four mahogany walls. The cover of his cherry-wood desk had been wrenched from hinges and split down the middle. Papers, official and personal, were scattered in bits over the green carpet. The sheets had been ripped from the bunk and torn in shreds.

And the girl sat in the midst of the ruins, with her knees drawn up under her chin, her arms folded upon them, the kimono only clinging to the edges of her shoulders. Her mouth was tightly shut, and her hard, wild eyes were fixed straight ahead unseeing.

She did not move a muscle of her face or her body as Don Lazarro came into the cabin, only stared with tight-lipped gravity into the wood of the door as though she were concentrating upon a baffling problem.

He looked down upon her head with a faint, tolerant smile and said gently, "Naida da Silva."

THE girl looked up at him immediately, tilting her head so far back that he could see the cords of her neck. The effect was startling, and she maintained this awkward position without visible discomfort.

"My name, *tuan*," she affirmed with a husky cough.

He frowned. "Do not call me *tuan*. My name is Don Lazarro. You do not recognize me, do you?"

It was an effort for him to get the last words out of his mouth.

She stared vaguely up at him a moment longer. The light changed in her faded eyes, but her expression was sullen as before.

"Aye; Don Lazarro. I never forget a face—a man's face. It was in Papeete. You tried to stab Henri Lopin. So?"

His expression of fear was dismissed by the broadest of grins.

"I am the one, Naida," he agreeed proudly. "I was afraid you might not remember. Why do you sit on the floor?"

Her eyes pinched with suspicion. "Where I am, I can listen to all you have to say to me. But first— *Tuan*, my tongue is acid as lime and my throat sharper than pepper. You will pour me a wee drink, to steady me. Eh?" She got this off lightly, with an air of serene confidence, supposing that her suggestion would be immediately acted upon.

"You have had your last one, Naida," Don Lazarro informed her quietly.

The girl blinked at him with mouth wide open; then a curious noise, a sustained cackle, issued from it. She slapped her knees.

"*Pergi!* The gorilla is a pussyfooter! Ah, *tuan*," she railed, coaxingly; "come buy sis a li'l drink. Sis is dyin' of thirst. Take Naida's word, *tuan*, you'll be treated——"

She stopped, her lips continuing to work, but she shrank from him with terror.

Don Lazarro did not strike. The hand fell at his side. He appreciated the superiority of his position; for he was not used to dealing with women. His expression became tender and gentle again; and the girl attended him wonderingly though suspiciously, while a patch of unhealthy color crept upon either cheekbone.

He smiled. "Naida, it is simply this: When I found you again last night, the old life was cut off from you as if by a sword. I am a simple man." His smile was one of easy self-confidence, for this was a selfish matter at best.

"I can keep but one idea in my head at a time—say, two," he went on. "I've carried the one twelve years—that is you, Naida. The other has nothing to do with this."

The girl Naida was incredulous, trembling upon laughter.

"Oh, my head is a coconut to-day! Let me think, Don Lazarro. You have found me again and taken me to your ship because you have loved no one but me for twelve years. So?"

He nodded heavily.

"I am to drink no more."

"No more, Naida."

"I am to be the *orang-gila's* slave."

"That is true," agreed Don Lazarro.

"Is it the black smoke or the square-face?" she snapped.

"It is neither. It is love. You will never leave this ship without me—and you will always come back."

"*Sumpah!* You are a fool, *tuan*."

"It will take a little time for you to understand," he conceded tolerantly as he moved toward the door, "that all men are not Henri Lopins."

He closed the door behind him and locked it upon a stream of torrential abuse. He was smiling contentedly when he returned to the bridge and resumed his inspection of the eastern islands. The renewal of the destructive sounds below ruffled him no more than the wing of a gnat ruffles the surface of a glassy sea. None but an iron-willed man could have endured the strain aboard the *Gladiator* in the following days.

The crew became demoralized. At any hour of the day or night the sounds of despair and destruction might burst from the master's quarters. Naida da Silva profanely rejected the food that was brought to her at intervals during the first forty-eight hours of her confinement. It was a wonder that the triple shock to her system did not kill her—that she did not attempt to kill herself. A sullen but growing curiosity perhaps sustained her.

HER position was incredible. Men did not do such things for women of her kind. There was something back of it—something horrible!

Don Lazarro interviewed her at port-holes from time to time, but did not seek to pacify her. He simply reiterated his assertions that he had never loved another woman; that her past was none of his affair; that he had the capacity of laying the world at her feet, if she so desired.

All such assurances she greeted with sullenness, suspicion, malediction. Her attitude did not worry him in the least. He knew that it would yield, soften, that she would in time become grateful, and in turn loving, after the manner of her kind—an abusive, formidable, but wholly satisfying love.

It would satisfy him. He had no false notions in the matter. He wanted no shrinking violet. Naida da Silva carried what he desired in the cup of her heart. Give the absinth time to evaporate, and she would come around. That was his way of looking at it—the only way. It was inevitable—he had the will to make it inevitable. And he also had the patience of Job.

Don Lazarro did not, unfortunately, have the will to divert his fortunes into their former happy channels. The rediscovery of Naida da Silva had stood for

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Naida was screaming at him, forming violent gestures with her free hand. Her shirt-waist was in tatters; and her black hair whipped and cracked from her head in a wild banner.

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more than the realization of a long-cherished hope. Her reentrance into the sphere of his activities was a material sign that the unseen powers were preparing to smile upon him once more. He believed in these powers; and certainly, from his own point of view, he seemed always to have moved along a predetermined course, as a steel doll glides over a mirror with an unseen magnet moving underneath.

Despite the happy omen, Fortune forbore smiling.

He delivered the indentured coolies to the Chinese overseer at the phosphate diggings on Christmas Island. For his pains his ship was chartered to carry a starvation cargo of the broken rock to Melbourne. From Melbourne he carried hardwood to Sydney. From Sydney he carried a light deck-load of sugar machinery to Surabaya. From Surabaya, a quarter-cargo of artificially dried copra to Ceylon. The stench did not leave the ship for weeks; but the copra staved off the day when he would reach the end of the tether. Far Eastern commerce was suffering a lamentable depression; even his powerful competitors were having difficulties. He was only existing, hardly paying his way from week to week, from trip to trip—a losing game of nip and tuck, squeeze and threat, and ruthless corner-cutting. They were months when Don Lazarro all but lost faith in himself.

The only improvement in his captive during this time was purely a physical one. Sea air and regularity of diet and sleeping hours worked a marvelous change in Naida da Silva. Her hands and arms and face subtly lost their thinness; her lips, a degree of their harshness. She was less sinister to look upon; her profile softened, her skin cleared, losing its awful ashiness and attaining the lucent, creamy whiteness usually signalizing a healthful condition in pallid, dark-haired women. There were rare moments when she reflected the glory of her former beauty, but these occurred never when Don Lazarro was in her presence.

At an early stage of her confinement on this floating prison he moved her to a cabin provided in the *Gladiator's* happier days for the accommodation of passengers. It was roomy and bright and airy. His attitude in the matter was curiously virtuous: He would have none of her until she surrendered of her own free will.

IT WAS a strange relation, but Naida da Silva throve in it. And her attitude of sullen suspicion persisted from the morning when she had looked into his eyes from the wreckage on his cabin floor. She suspected mischief of a nameless, terrible kind. His motive was so uncomplex that it became incredible. And the gratitude which he had so confidently looked forward to was not forthcoming.

He insisted that she sit across from him at meal times; and she did so, keeping her eyes on her plate, occasionally murmuring in Malay or English to the first officer or the chief engineer, but never speaking directly to Don Lazarro unless he made a remark or asked a question bluntly.

It was his first taste of the stubbornness of a woman, punishment of the most effective nature. It baffled him, and in time he became discouraged and disheartened. Nor did the persistent dearth of cargoes make his cross the easier to bear. Don Lazarro's career as a steamship owner was measured by days—dangled from a shoestring.

When he started north from Singapore one morning with new sawmill equipment for a Siamese teakwood company and a deck-well load of empty barrels for the Bangkok Cement Works, it was his first venture into the apple-green gulf in months—since Naida had been aboard.

Cirrus clouds in feathers and fleecy puffs streamed across the azimuth. The sun beat down through a sticky invisible blanket of moisture. An air of ill-boding seemed to hang about the ship.

Don Lazarro was stripped to singlet and lounging pajamas. He was hearkening to a familiar imaginary rumbling in his eardrums—and a smile came involuntarily to his lips.

HE LOVED the green gulf. It baffled him and it fascinated him and it drew upon some remote mysterious well of his nature. He was in curious harmony with its black rages, its sinister calms, when the sheet of unflawed emerald, glinting like a layer of splintered green ice, stretched to the powdery lavender haze of the nameless islands. The brilliant purple dots, where jellyfish drifted, suggested germs of thought afloat in a serene and massive intellect. Early evening completed the green circle, when the blue faded out of the sky and the color of the gulf rose up to form, for a breathless moment, a hemisphere of apple-green, intense, disquieting, before the black of night rushed down.

Myths he had read in his youth had left sharp impressions in his memory; and he had pictured, reflectively, a strange and formidable apple-green Buddha, who was the god of the gulf, a lazy green monster, perhaps enshrined in the nameless islands in a windy cave, moody, greedy, and dissatisfied like himself.

It was all that was left of the child in Don Lazarro—this apple-green god of his. And certainly no one who knew him aboard or ashore would have believed him capable of such childish notions.

The first mate was fussing about anxiously, occasionally mopping the sweat from his face and forehead with a yellow-bordered silk handkercheif. Don Lazarro's smile coupled with the impending thing in the atmosphere made him nervous, ill at ease, almost frightened.

Except for the coming and going of a sultry breeze the air was materially undisturbed—yet it was packed with warning. The *Gladiator* cleaved through a dead, oily sea with "vice" in it. The glass was dropping rapidly.

Don Lazarro continued to watch the weather with an unrelaxing grin, maintaining a careful eye upon the drection of the stiffening wind.

The sky was darkening. By ten o'clock he knew for certain that he was taking his ship squarely into the heart of the coming storm, yet he did not alter his course by half a point.

"It's comin', sir. We're heading square into it," the mate enlightened him.

Don Lazarro agreed with a silent movement of his head.

By eleven o'clock the hot spark of the sun swimming in bronze vapor was withdrawn; the sky became a race-track for ugly black wind clouds and thunderheads; and the light of the heavens was shut down to a brown glow. The wind was coming up puff by puff, each more violent than the one before.

At noon the watch was changed, but Don Lazarro did not go below. Shortly after the relieving mate came on duty, the girl Naida crept up the ladder to the bridge, glanced vacantly at Don Lazarro and went away from him to the starboard side, resting her hands lightly on the rail. She seemed unafraid. It was her first typhoon at sea and she was inquisitive.

Don Lazarro watched the wind tear at her hair until strands of it were loosened to crack behind her like the black ribbons of the sash about her waist. One tumultuous blast freed her hair entirely, sending it in a dark misty stream behind her, her face chiseled by the blasts like the figurehead on a sailing ship.

The green gulf was running ink-black, piled into waves of pyramidal formation, which marched down in an endless army. Streaks of yellow-tinged foam were snatched up and flung against the masts, the cabin walls and decks, crackling where they landed like showers of broken glass.

The strident hum of the storm went higher—roaring, climbed the scale to a screaming zenith, as of millions of screeching devils. The *Gladiator* at full speed ahead staggered and plunged, rose and fell, ascending, twisting, now brightened by the lurid green glare of lightning, then dropped into bottomless darkness. Rain fell in torrents, often whipping by horizontally as the gale snatched it.

Don Lazarro was in his own—confident, exultant. His singlet was in ribbons. He was drenched from head to foot with rain-water and sea-water. Every blast he answered with a grin; for this storm, like all storms to him, was a personal affair. He had the utmost confidence in his ship; no brew of wind and waves could frighten her. The Malay *serangs*, who are a wise and philosophical race of men, say that a man who goes out of his way to fight the wind is a fool or a god. They allow that much latitude to men of Don Lazarro's stamp.

IT WAS midafternoon when the *Gladiator* lurched into the breathless soapy hush of the typhoon center—a silent vortex whither wind and waves were inexorably drawn.

Flocks of gulls and swallows and swarms of "typhoon flies" and gnats circled and buzzed and hummed about the masts—were lost in a burst of confusion as the silence of the low pressure area was left astern. The fight was only begun, for the furies lay ahead.

A toppling combination of waves seized the *Gladiator* by the nose; the bridge soared up and up, and the greasy, striped surface seemed to fall away, as though the *Gladiator* were being sucked into the clouds, or the sea drained away from under her keel. She came down with a crash, a groan, a tired shudder. The impact shivered the length of Don Lazarro's spine.

He was staring ahead at a reformation of watery pyramids when a hand clutched him by the arm. He was annoyed. He glanced aside.

Naida da Silva was screaming at him, forming violent gestures with her free hand. Her shirt-waist was in tatters; and her black hair whipped and cracked from her head in a wild banner.

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He put his lips against her ear and shouted reassurance.

"We'll come out. No fear! Give me three hours."

She pulled his head down roughly with both arms, and held his ear tight against her mouth. The wind reduced her scream to a far-away whisper.

"Men— Wreckage——"

He yelled at the top of his lungs: "Too bad!"

"They'll die——"

"Can't be helped!"

"Save them!"

"Ship would go!"

"You must!"

Don Lazarro gripped her by the shoulders, and stared at her. Her face was streaming with sea-water; her eyes were wilder than the morning when she awoke in his cabin; and her lips were working rapidly as words unheard by him were torn from them.

He shook his head, but she pulled him down to her again.

"You don't love me!" was what she clamored into his ear.

Shocked, he answered: "It means the ship—crew—every man of us—*you!*"

He tried to push her away, but her arms were wrapped so fiercely about his neck he was close to strangling. Her expression had become glorified.

"Worth it! A chance! You will! Don't let them die—*tuan!*"

And before he could frame a denial her lips, wet and salty and cold, were fastened upon his — a maddened, storm-born caress.

If Naida da Silva had told him then to drive his ship upon the fangs of visible rocks, Don Lazarro would have done so unhesitatingly; yet what she had called upon him to do was no less fatal.

He took the wheel himself, rang for half-speed, and a foot at a time bore over and down upon the bobbing yellow speck of wreckage.

There were two white spots and a black one upon it. Through marine glasses the spots materialized into a Malay or an Indian and two white men—stark naked and clinging to lashed spars. From time to time they were buried in foam and black water.

In the magnanimous effort to save the three lives the *Gladiator* lost three lifeboats; every barrel in the after deck-well was launched overboard in a yellow sweep. A forward deck stanchion was twisted into the shape of the letter S when a deck cabin burst and scattered; for it was necessary to broach, to slip into a cavernous trough.

THE castaways were shipped a moment before the grandfather of all waves toppled above the ship and descended—a crushing weight of black liquid tons. Don Lazarro's heart went down into his boots; for the crack of impact was, he believed, the crack of their doom—if a single hatch-cover collapsed.

For a horrible moment the *Gladiator* lay inert, smothered, helpless. Then a spasm shot through her, and she shook. The water cascaded from her decks, roared in cataracts from the gutters. It was as if she had clambered up from the very bottom of the gulf.

A mile or two ahead a shaft of sunlight pierced through the clouds and lay shining upon apple-green water. And a half-hour later the *Gladiator*, battered and sagging and limping, but alive, crawled out of the tumult into sunlight, bright water and blue skies.

Don Lazarro gave up the wheel, but he did not go below. It was characteristic of him to be indifferent to the identity of the men he—or Naida da Silva—had rescued. He had room for nothing but sublime exultation. The tide had turned. The God of the Green Gulf was smiling. What had brought about the change in Naida he could not grasp; somehow she had been transformed by the tumult into the timid-eyed girl he had worshiped for a day and a day in Papeete. Gone was all sullenness and suspicion. Her very glance, when she left the bridge to change into dry clothing, had been a caress.

Shortly afterward a young man in borrowed dungarees made his way up the ladder and bowed with dignity. He was yellow of skin, and his eyes were black and oblique. He was not a white man, as Don Lazarro had at first supposed, but a Siamese.

He addressed Don Lazarro in the gentle, melodious accents of his country.

"*Nai bai nai-dja*—whither goest thou?"

And Don Lazarro replied, "Bangkok."

The young man was pleased. "It is fortunate," he commented, as though he were conferring a privilege upon Don Lazarro. "Be sure, the Raja Nephal will not hide his gratitude."

Don Lazarro stiffened. "The Raja Nephal?"

"My father," the half-drowned young man smiled.

So far as the record exists the remainder of Don Lazarro's story can be briefly told. He was summoned before Rama the Fifth and ceremoniously presented with an order of merit, a device of gold and diamonds. The tide in his affairs had turned, as he had suspected, when Chance brought Naida da Silva to him in Singapore.

Because of his marriage to a woman of her caliber, he was an outcast from the white colonies where his trade took him—the conventions demanded that; and he did not hold it against them. In fact, it was as he wished; for his ship and his bride and the apple-green gulf were his universe.

A Thwarted Fate

By B. E. H. Harris

FOR years Fate left me free to wander far,
Until I loved fresh scent of good white lead,
Harsh groans of creaking anchor chains, queer sights
Of foreign ports. Perverse at last, she said,
"Enough, vague dreamer! Now with hoe or pen
Quick to thy task. Be thou as other men!"

From western prairies lone gleams Fuji's face
In all its snow-crowned beauty; wild winds bear
The swelling of a Russian choral hymn;
The Northern rose breathes India's jasmine, fair.
So have I thwarted Fate! While memories last,
Gray present throbs with glories of the past!

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Photo by White

"The Gold Diggers" has been telling New York about the chorus-girl's life since September, 1919. This scene shows Ina Claire, the star, at the left.

The Long Run *as a* Curse

By Alexander Woollcott

TIME was when the phrase "One Year in New York" had a magic sound and the very sight of it on the bill-boards of the provinces was supposed to pack the theatres all the way from Syracuse to San Diego. That time has passed.

There are several reasons why it has lost its quondam authority. To begin with, it was depreciated by counterfeiters. Plays that had faltered along on Broadway for no more than four or five months would go a-touring with the unblushing claim of a year's run. And managers unwilling to stoop to that would nevertheless be sufficiently venturesome to keep a play alive in New York by artificial means in order that an accurate, though meaningless, claim to a year on Broadway might precede it along the road. The spectacle of a playwright or producer quietly buying one or two thousand dollars' worth of tickets to his own show every week in order to keep the box-office statements up to the deadline was no uncommon sight a few seasons ago. But that game is about played out.

For one thing, the redoubled demand for New York stages has made such an experiment difficult, and anyway it did not work often enough to encourage imitation. Even so astute a producer as Mr. Belasco was known to keep a play going in Gotham, at the loss of a small fortune, only to have the playgoers on the road then behave exasperatingly as though they had never heard of it. Indeed, much buncombe had led those playgoers to gaze upon "One Year in New York" with a fishy eye, to murmur "Oh, is that so?" and then to reserve seats that evening at a bridge-table rather than at the local opera-house.

These painful phenomena were accompanied by their equally confusing disposition to flock to certain plays and players that New York had not seen at all, or had seen briefly and with scorn. Such stars as William Hodge, May Robson and Guy Bates Post can draw the American multitude without a thought of its biggest city, and the road made fortunes for such works as "A Bird of Paradise" and "Omar the Tentmaker" which New York treated coldly. Then the sight of a farce running all season in Los Angeles without New York's seal of approval, and the sight of Chicagoans bestowing the record-breaking run of thirty-five weeks on "Welcome Stranger," without waiting for instruction from New York as to whether or not they were to like it—all such manifestations of a mutinous spirit have at last begotten in the slow-moving managerial mind the suspicion that the slogan, "One Year in New York" would butter no parsnips.

BESIDES, recent theatrical history has enfeebled that slogan. A year's run on Broadway seems a short and comparatively unsuccessful engagement when set alongside the new records now being written on the walls of the New York theatres. "Lightnin' " outdistanced them all a year ago, passed its thousandth performance at the Gaiety on last New Year's Eve, and is still going strong. "The Gold-Diggers" would doubtless have broken the record had not Frank Bacon's comedy already broken it. How, in these days of larger publics and smaller theatres, the latter-day favorites have outrun those of bygone seasons may be gathered by glancing at any table which shows the figures, how "Hazel Kirke" ran 485 performances, "The Boomerang" 522, "The Music Master" 540, "Florodora" 547, "Adonis" 603, "Peg o' My Heart" 604, and "A Trip to Chinatown" 657. These were once marvels, but "The Gold-diggers," which opened at the Lyceum on September 30, 1919, is still there and "Lightnin' " began at the Gaiety on August 26, 1918, when the Germans still held St. Mihiel.

As a matter of fact, "The Music Master" knew in all more than a thousand performances, but it was a run broken by summer vacations and one interruption or another. It has been a matter of general consent to regard the run of "Lightnin' " as continuous, whereas, in strict truth, its smooth course at the Gaiety was rudely broken at the end of its first year. There was a suspension of four weeks, which was caused by the actors' strike. When the whistle of the mummers' union blew, the entire cast of Bacon's comedy walked out in a body—did so with extra relish, perhaps, because they could parade Broadway under a transparency reading: " 'Lightnin' ' has struck."

But, fairly enough, that break is ignored by the statisticians and "Lightnin' " can now be said to be approaching the end of its third year in New York. Will it run another? There is no question at all but what it could. Indeed, there is good reason to believe "Lightnin' " could jog on at the Gaiety for ten years without ever experiencing the insult of an unsold seat. But perhaps its sponsors would prefer to move along. To the onlooking layman, such a move might seem an indication of mild insanity; but as a matter of fact it would not be difficult to glean material for an essay entitled: "The Long Run Considered as a Curse."

Obviously it is a curse to the hopeful young actor who plans to grow in ability and reputation by being seen in many rôles, and who finds himself booked for endless months in one unchanging part.

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Then it is none too welcome to a player of established reputation who, nevertheless, is ambitious to experiment in various characters and who, also, may be too restless a spirit to play the one rôle night after night without suffering a boredom inexpressible.

However much the lesser players in "Lightnin'" may be chafing at its inexhaustibility, it may be guessed that no such restlessness afflicts Frank Bacon, who, at the age of fifty-five or thereabouts, finds himself in a success for the first time in his life and is doubtless quite content to go on playing it as long as he lives. But whether to go on playing it at the Gaiety or to take adventurously to the high road—that is another question.

When this season ends and it comes time to make arrangements for the next, the question will have to be answered. In favor of staying on at the Gaiety is the factor of certainty, the factor of inertia, and the factor of pride—a real pride in pulverizing still more completely the long-run record of America. In favor of moving is the audible voice of the counting-house suggesting that it would be more immediately profitable to do so. There is no doubt that outside New York, where the theatres are larger and the rents not so large, Frank Bacon in "Lightnin'" could pay all expenses of transportation and still turn in a profit double that which is possible at a theatre like the Gaiety, which, in addition to being tiny, is wantonly located on one of the most costly patches of real estate America boasts. Indeed, one road company, sent out tentatively with a substitute in the title rôle, has turned in just such a double profit all this season.

After all, dispatching Bacon and his troupe through the provinces would merely be taking Mahomet to the mountain. In this the third year of the engagement, three-fourths of the patronage is drawn from visitors to town, a circumstance deeply afflicting to the neighboring cigar-stores and soda-fountains, whose proprietors complain bitterly that it is only the New Yorker who, on the chance that he may see some friends, strolls out between the acts. The visitor goes to the smoking-room instead and often the doorman at the Gaiety twiddles his thumbs all evening without issuing a single door-check.

EVEN "Lightnin'," now drifting comfortably toward its 1200th performance, has some distance to go before it reaches the old London record of 1466 performances which was held for more than twenty years by "Charley's Aunt," only to be shattered in October, 1919, by "Chu-Chin-Chow," which is still turning them away at His Majesty's Theatre in the Haymarket.

Its success has been fantastic. It was in the late spring of 1916 that Sir Herbert Tree was induced to lease his theatre in the Haymarket to Oscar Ashe for an Oriental spectacle Ashe had contrived as a vehicle for himself and his wife. Tree was skeptical and wished to be sure that the piece would either yield big revenues to the theatre or, as he expected and rather hoped, give way at once to something else. So he bound Ashe by contract to play in every performance of the play's run at that theatre and not go wandering off temperamentally on impromptu vacations in the fashion of English actors. Also he bound him to pack himself off, play and all, whenever the weekly receipts should fall below fifteen thousand dollars. This, the wily Tree thought, would leave the stage free for some production of his own before long.

That next season Tree died, and from his estate some theatrical speculators bought His Majesty's, paying one hundred thousand dollars down and agreeing to furnish the balance at the end of the run of "Chu," when their occupancy might become effective. Also they contracted to accept as their first tenant a spectacle called "Mecca," which Ashe had fashioned as a successor to "Chu." All that was arranged in the early part of 1917, and then every one sat down to wait cheerfully for the popular interest in "Chu" to abate. They are still waiting.

That preposterous play goes on and on. It has brought affluence to the distrustful Tree's large and astonished family. It has enraged the baffled purchasers of the theatre, who have parted with a tidy sum and can do nothing about it, except, perhaps, indulge the hope that Ashe will break his leg. It has made Ashe the richest actor in the British Empire, and the most supremely bored actor in the world.

Ashe clung covetously to his beloved "Mecca" for three seasons and then, because he could produce it only *after* the run of "Chu," he groaned and turned it over to Morris Gest for American exploitation. Already New York has seen it, and Chicago, but Ashe, who merely wrote it, has not seen so much as a rehearsal. He is bound hand and foot to the interminable "Chu-Chin-Chow." For all details on the long run considered as a curse, write to Oscar Ashe, Stage Entrance, His Majesty's Theatre, Haymarket, London, England. The address seems a permanent one.

Frank Bacon began doing this in "Lightnin'" away back in August, 1918, and has been at it ever since.

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The tramp took his place on the rock and the pedler fell to at once while Riddles superintended the job.

Riddles

The Story of a Summer Holiday

By Irving Bacheller

A TWO-PART STORY—PART ONE

ONE of the most notable of recent fiction successes was "A Man for the Ages," Mr. Bacheller's novel inspired by the life of Lincoln. After its serial publication in EVERYBODY'S, the book became one of the six best sellers for 1920. In the story that follows, the same author, with characteristic quaint humor and pungent philosophy, tells of a young New England millionaire who posed as Uncle Sam Junior for a summer month's holiday. The story will be concluded in the June issue.

Chapter One

John Riddles, the young and wealthy Mill Owner, whose health has been impaired by the Tyranny of Success and the Pivot Chair and the Soft Embrace of Luxury, revolts and goes on a vacation, and for the first time he enjoys the Companionship of Himself and of Good Digestion, and meets a Singular Character, and gets a real job.

"WHOA! Hold up!" said Riddles. "Pull out of the road a little and stop your engine."

The chauffeur obeyed his master.

"Say, I'll give you a vacation if you'll give me one," Riddles proposed.

"Anything the matter?" the chauffeur asked with a puzzled look.

"Yes. I'm smothered in luxury and half paralyzed in the affectionate embrace of comfort. I'm dying of idleness. My internal organs have knocked off—struck, as you might say. If a man's feet and hands are doing nothing, his internal organs insist upon the same privilege. Here's where I hop out of the lap of luxury."

Riddles arose, drew his silver-mounted walking-stick out of the golf bag and stepped to the ground and added:

"Jones, I'm a discontented rebel. I'm sick of the odors of crude oil and gasoline and carbon dioxide. I'm tired of the look of blurred landscapes. You may return and put the car in Bell's garage and go on a month's vacation."

"You don't mean to pike off in the hot sun, do you?" the chauffeur asked with a look of astonishment.

"Yes, I'm going to burn the carbon out of my cylinders and push on with my own power. Once I get the old engine tuned up it will take me anywhere. It has more gears than any piece of machinery you ever saw. I don't know where I am—couldn't even tell the name of the state—and I guess you don't know, if anybody should ask you."

The chauffeur, with a puzzled look, turned the car and said before starting:

"Aint you goin' to take a grip with you?"

"Nary a grip!" said Riddles. "Going to travel light. No baggage but a toothbrush. When I need clothes I'll buy 'em."

The car started on its homeward journey and Riddles, the famous Riddles of Belleharbor, was alone on a strange country road in a beautiful valley of New England. He was taking a rest. His men had struck, and then he had struck suddenly and unexpectedly. His men had gathered about the gates of the mill prepared to throw bricks and stones. Suddenly they discovered that there was no one to throw them at. Riddles had closed the plant and gone off for a holiday. In their talk with each other his help were wont to refer to him as "the old man" and to speak longingly of his "wad."

"What does he expect to do with his wad?" one of them had asked in a public meeting. "He's nobody but himself. I suppose he thinks that he can't afford to git married."

The truth is that Riddles was only twenty-nine; his "wad" was undoubtedly large—the largest in the city of Belleharbor—and he was a bachelor, but a rather discontented one. He had built the big Hotel

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Teneriffe largely for his own accommodation. Still, its crowded corridors and dining-rooms had not relieved his loneliness.

"A man of your wealth ought to have a wife and a home," a friend had said to him one day.

"It's my success which has stood in the way of it," he had answered. "Wealth is a dangerous thing. It is hard on women. Look at those we know. If I could find a girl who had the right view of money and was not likely to be spoiled by it, I'd marry her quick if she'd have me. Doubtless there are many such, but they don't seem to come my way."

Riddles stood looking down into the fertile, green valley. Mowing machines were clanging across the meadows and filling the air with their familiar battle-song. A gentle breeze came off the shorn lands laden with odors which he had known and loved in his boyhood—clover and daisies and wild strawberries and timothy. He had been raised in a fine old New England homestead surrounded by fertile acres, and there he had laid the foundation of his big structure of bone and muscle which had made him one of the most formidable heroes of the stadium in his college days.

He took a letter from his pocket which he had received at his last stopping place and reread it. The letter was from John Galt, his friend and superintendent. He gave particular attention to this item:

> If convenient I wish you would stop at Coulterville and call on my friends. It is an ancient stronghold of the Galts' who are scattered through the hills and valleys. Be sure to see my uncle, David Galt, who has more influence than any man in that county. The sweetest girl in the world has a summer home near there. Her name is Harriet Martin. Her mother is a widow. They live on a farm. I have seen Miss Harriet twice and was to have met her in New York last winter, but the trip to Europe defeated my plan. I wish you could get acquainted with her and organize a dinner party at the Inn and invite me. I could run up for a day as well as not. Be careful, I beg of you, not to fall in love with her yourself. If you were not girl-proof I wouldn't trust you with such a mission—darned if I would.

He folded the letter and put it back in his pocket with a smile and started down the road.

"Girl-proof!" he laughed. "That shows that he doesn't know me. Poor devil! I'll give him a scare."

IT WAS a relief to get rid of the car and its noises and its oleaginous flavors and its swirl of wind. Now he could hear the songs of the birds and smell the breath of the meadows. Moreover, he felt a joy and a stimulation in the use of his bones and muscles.

"I should think it couldn't be far from here," he said to himself as he went on.

In fact it was not. At the corners, not half a mile farther on, he saw a sign-board which directed him into the road to Coulterville sixteen miles ahead.

In a few minutes he came upon a farmer working with a scythe near the road wall.

"Do you need any help?" Riddles asked.

The farmer looked at the traveler about whom there was a rich glow of blue silk and polished tan leather and clean gray flannel and spotless tweed and artful tailoring.

"Do I want any help? Of course I do. Everybody wants help these days," the farmer answered.

"Would you give me a job?" Riddles asked.

The farmer smiled and felt his beard thoughtfully as he answered:

"Say, I've hired tramps an' boys an' ol' men, an' I've got one feller that escaped from the insane asylum; but I don't want no millionaires."

Riddles laughed at the shrewdness of the man who stood resting on his scythe. "There's no getting away from it once you have the mark on you," he thought.

"I'm a working man the same as you are," he declared. "I haven't forgot how to swing a scythe or handle a pitchfork. Give me a trial."

"Say, mister, if I was to give you a job, do ye know what I'd want ye to do?" the farmer asked. "I'd tell ye to keep right on walkin' 'til ye got out o' sight. You could earn more for me travelin' than ye could makin' hay. You're a good feller too, an' I'll bet on it."

"YOU don't seem to like the look of me," Riddles laughed.

"I do like it, an' that's all that's the matter with ye." the farmer went on. "I like it so well that I'd just love to set down an' do nothin' but look at ye all day—you're so gol' darn han'some. Senators and Presidents an' bankers ain't no good in a hay medder. We never hire 'em in the summer time. Did you ever see a millionaire livin' on a farm?"

"No, but I've seen a farm livin' on a millionaire," said Riddles.

The farmer laughed. "Say, you've said it," he answered. "Seems so the farm jumped up in the air an' landed on his back as if it wanted a ride."

"A farm doesn't know how to behave in swell society," said Riddles as he began to walk on.

"Say, mister, I'll give ye a dollar if you'll set down here an' tell me who ye be an' what's the matter with ye," the farmer called. "Have ye escaped from that damn insane asylum? If there's any screw loose in ye, maybe I can tighten it."

"Yes, I've escaped from a large insane asylum. Built it myself an' have lived in it for eight years. But I shall not need your screw-driver—got one o' my own."

Riddles went on down the road. It was a beautiful countryside of smooth and fertile farms and neat, white houses and well-kept yards. The hills were crowned with light-green savin spires, tall and shapely. Here and there a great elm towered above the meadow flats and flung its feathery dome into the sky.

After a walk of an hour or so he was overtaken by a traveling store—a large, square, glowing, red box mounted on a Ford chassis, its sides lettered in gold with the legend:

"Farmers' Supply Company of Boston, A. Hinchman, Agent."

A number of hand rakes and pitchforks rested on top of the box. As it was getting on toward luncheon time with no tavern in sight, Riddles accepted the invitation of the driver and climbed up beside him for a lift.

"I am A. Hinchman, Agent," said the driver.

"I congratulate you. My name is Riddles."

"I used to shave a man by the name o' Riddles—Lemuel Riddles—I took care o' his face for him for about six years," said A. Hinchman. "It was in good condition, too, when I turned it over to another man. Not a pimple on it!"

"You talk as if you had fed and watered it and given it exercise," said Riddles with a smile.

"You bet I kep' it smooth," the pedler went on. "It was half an acre o' face, too. You see, before I began shovin' this store around the country I was in the barber business down in Portsmouth. That kind o' led up to this."

"How so?"

"It was the gift o' gab I got there," Hinchman went on. "It's wonderful how it draws a man out mowin' whiskers an' trimmin' hair. You hear all kinds o' talk. In head work ye just naturally learn how to use your head. Honest, a few years of it is as good as a college education. I got to be some talker. You put a parrot in a barber shop and in a little while he's quite a bird. It would surprise ye to see how much he'll pick up. One day I was cuttin' a man's hair. 'Say,' he says when I got through, 'you ought to be sellin' goods. You can talk a man helpless. He'd buy to get rid o' you. If you ever want a job come to my office.' I went and have been earnin' nigh onto sixty dollars a week since, which ain't bad wages."

They came to a road inn, presently, where Riddles invited Mr. A. Hinchman, Agent, to have lunch with him. It was a flat and uninteresting bit of country thereabouts and so Riddles, although weary of the trader's talk, rode on with him after luncheon.

"DO YOU happen to know where the Martin farm is?" Riddles asked.

"The widow Martin's?—you bet," said Hinchman. "Was there this morning. Sold 'em some forks an' rakes an' a lot o' plates an' napkins for a picnic. They're goin' off for a picnic somewhere this afternoon. It's only a few miles up the road."

About two o'clock they came to a shady grove filled with the murmur of flowing water.

"Here's where I leave you," said Riddles. "I'm going to lie down here in the shade and take a nap."

"I turn into the road to Hope Center just above," said A. Hinchman. "I'll stop and look for ye when I come back, by an' by. Maybe you'll want to go on with me toward the Notch. I like yer company, darned if I don't."

The pedler drove on and Riddles entered the grove which had been the resort of picnic parties. There were dead ashes in a little stone arch near which there were crusts of bread and crumpled pieces of wrapping-paper. A river, near the road, sped over its rocky bed between high shores. Invited by its sound he went and looked down into the river alley, cedared on both sides, almost to the water's edge. He lay on a mossy bank in the cool shade of the grove and closed his eyes. He was weary. The song of the river and the smell of ferns and grasses were grateful to him. He fell into sleep and pleasant dreams of a time long past. The jar of approaching footsteps soon awoke him.

"Hello ol' pal!" said a cheerful voice.

Riddles rose and rubbed his eyes. A tall man in faded and seedy garments stood before him with a stout, crooked stick in his

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hand. The lower part of the bronzed face was covered with black stubble. A mass of dark, dusty, unkempt hair showed beneath the dirty, torn crown of his straw hat. His face had a grimy look.

"Hello!" Riddles answered.

"I'm kind o' scared o' you," said the tramp. "I hope you're a man o' good morals."

"Why?"

"You're such a disreputable looking cuss. Haven't you got any decent clothes? Anybody would think that you were nothing but a cheap, common millionaire."

Riddles looked at himself and laughed.

"You look like a worn-out New England farm—run down, but not quite deserted," he remarked.

"There's still a man in the house," said the tramp. "Sir, is there anything I can do for you? I should judge that you have seen better days. I don't know as I can afford to get mixed up with ye. By George! I believe you'd work for a living—darned if I don't. You look like one of those unprincipled fellers who would tell the truth when a lie would answer better. Darned if I don't believe you would stand beside a keg of beer and drown your sorrows in cold water."

Riddles surveyed the humorous tramp with a smile and said: "I should judge that you and water haven't met for years. I suppose you are afraid o' being drowned? What a flavor of history you carry with you!"

"You are wrong. I am a man without a history. A history is expensive. I couldn't afford it. Only kings and nations can indulge in such extravagance. I haven't even a past. It has been wiped off the slate. I have nothing in the world but a promising present and a golden, magnificent future all depending on your generosity."

"It's a slender thread," said Riddles with a smile. "I haven't enough generosity to satisfy my own needs. What's the matter with your generosity? Looks as if it had been kind o' stingy with ye."

"How modern! You meet a man starving in the desert and you say, 'Be generous to yourself, old man.'"

"WHAT is the matter with you anyhow?" Riddles asked.

"Refinement, sir—native-born refinement. I hate hay and cattle and saws and scythes and rakes and forks and shovels. But chiefly of saws I sing. I get drunk, when I can, because it helps me to forget 'em. In the red cup I see and feel the greatness of my future—marble halls and noble company. I am filled with the undaunted resolve of that sagacious man who, having overcome the sacred town of Ilium, wandered far and visited the capitals of many nations and endured great sufferings on the deep. Oh, what I need is brain-work and plenty of it. If I had nothing to do but sit down to a lot of big problems you'd see how I'd eat 'em up."

"Then why try to solve the problem of living nowhere on nothing?" was Riddles' inquiry.

"I've got so much nothing that I'm a slave to it—an abject slave," said the tramp. "It holds me in its grasp like a tyrant."

"And sticks out like a load of hay," said Riddles.

"Sir, if I asked you for work, you'd give me a saw and send me out to the shed, wouldn't you?" the tramp asked. "You wouldn't take me to the mahogany desk and put a pen in my hand—that's sure. So I go on, from saw to saw, and arrive nowhere with nothing."

"Why don't you save what you earn and then earn more until you can dump your rags?"

"Nobody will have me around long. They're scared of me and they treat me like a dog. I have a sensitive nature. I can not stand it. I stayed in one place a week and slept in the hay-loft and ate in the shed—*me* a eating in a shed! Then I got into a quarrel with a coarse brute of a hired man and left. I hadn't enough to buy clothes, and so I bought whisky and forgot my troubles and enjoyed a day of unusual self-respect."

"Whisky is a good friend until it's overworked," said Riddles with a smile. "Then it goes to kickin' ye and every kick tears a hole in yer pants."

"I AM accustomed to the cold brutality of such remarks," the tramp answered. "Nobody understands me. When I emit a spark of cheerful hope, some hippopotamus comes along and quenches it with his cold, broad foot, as Lowell would have said. If only I could have a day worth remembering, I would no longer care to forget! My light is hidden under this bushel of dirty rags. What would you expect from me? I am a target for profanity and insult—a receptacle for stale bread and cold coffee and half-picked bones. I am a thing for dogs to bark at. Whichever way I turn the saw confronts me, I shudder at the thought of its serpent hiss. Good sir, if I had that suit you are wearing and only a little money the gate of Opportunity would open at once for me. I could begin, tomorrow, a life of usefulness and self respect."

"I guess the clothes would fit you all right," said Riddles. "You are about my size and build. Respectability is another matter. Still a man ought to be able to make that fit him if he wanted to. The suit is not important to me."

"But consider what it would mean to me—the difference between misery and happiness, between success and failure."

"Your talents are quite apparent," said Riddles. "You have almost talked the clothes off my back. If I had a decent hired man's suit to put on, I'd give 'em to you—darned if I wouldn't. A week's work in a hay-field would do me good anyhow."

"Let's have a smoke," Riddles added after a little silence as he gave the tramp a cigar. "Meanwhile let us walk together."

They rose and started for the road. They had not reached it when Riddles saw the pedler's store coming. A. Hinchman, Agent, stopped the engine, dismounted and approached the two men.

"Say, Hinchman, what do you sell?" Riddles asked.

"Anything that a farmer needs from a whetstone to a family Bible."

"Any clothes?"

"Just one farm suit left."

"Would it fit me?"

"Wouldn't wonder. It's A size."

"Let me see it."

The pedler opened his little store and took out the suit. "It's forty-four inch chest, light material, blue-and-white stripe, cool, durable an' well made."

"How about shoes, socks and underwear?"

"Got plenty of 'em, any size, weight or color."

"Give me a complete outfit and I'll step back o' the bushes and try 'em on," said Riddles.

"Be you goin' into the farmin' business?" the pedler asked, as with an armful of goods he accompanied Mr. Riddles.

"I be—if you can succeed in putting the right look on me."

"Say, if you're lookin' for a job—there's plenty of 'em at big wages. I don't know but I could get ye one with our company. They want a good talker in the store at Hopeville. It's good for fifty dollars a week."

"Don't try to spoil me with high life," said Riddles. "I'm lookin' for work and not for conversation."

The pedler looked at him with a puzzled expression and began to talk about "the farmin' business"—of health, hay and happiness growing while you sleep, of large yields and high prices.

Meanwhile Riddles took off his fine raiment and put on the farm suit. Its striped trousers did not quite reach the tops of his coarse cowhide shoes. The coat sleeves were a little too short and the coat itself showed a general lack of capacity. The coarse, cotton shirt had no collar. As he looked down at himself he remarked in the dialect of his fathers:

"Say, by gosh, I feel as full of fun as a barrel o' hard cider. If it don't cost too much, I'll keep it. What's the tariff?"

"The feelin's don't cost a cent—the outfit complete is twenty-seven dollars," said the pedler. "There's no jay in this country that's got anything on you."

"Except perfumery," said Riddles as he smelled his coat sleeve. "Where did you get it?"

"IT'S like bait on a fish-hook," said Hinchman. "I put a little on all my drygoods."

"And now it's on me. Violets! Gosh almighty! I look like a tramp and smell like a society queen. Have you any stout shears?"

"Three dozen pairs—best in the world."

"All right. I want you to cut and stack that man's hair an' run yer mowin' machine over his neck an' face an' tramp down what ye can't cut. Between the two of us there's some hayin' to be done, but I'll give ye thirty dollars for clothes an' labor."

"It's a bargain," said the pedler.

The tramp laughed when Riddles came out of the bushes.

"Say, ol' man—you're a bird!" he exclaimed.

"I've been caged, but you're still in the bush," said Riddles. "We'll have ye fixed soon." Turning to the pedler he added: "Bring a cake of soap—laundry soap, if you please—and two towels and then we'll all go down to the river. If you have a good straight razor, bring it along."

The pedler got the needed articles, locked his store and went with the two men, Riddles having the discarded garments on his arm.

At the river's edge the tramp held up a tooth-brush.

"Behold the only link which connects me with the dead and noble past!" he exclaimed. "My heart has fared badly, but I have always kept my teeth clean."

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He scrubbed his teeth, undressed and soaped himself and dove into a deep pool. Riddles observed that he had a fine, erect and almost Herculean figure and also that he had many scars on his back.

The millionaire in his farm suit sat on a rock while the tonsorial pedler cut his hair close. For a number of years he had worn a mustache and chin lock.

"We'll take off the mustache and enlarge the chin lock," said Riddles. "I'll soon have a bunch of whiskers to serve as a license for farm life. Perhaps it will keep the cattle from horning me."

When the shaving was accomplished, both the tramp and the pedler laughed at the new look of the late Mr. Riddles.

"Next!" the pedler called.

THE tramp took his place on the rock and the pedler fell to at once while Riddles superintended the job. The tramp's face was smoothly shaved, his hair neatly, but not closely, trimmed, and his head thoroughly shampooed. He was quite another sort of human being when he arose from the rock.

"Now get one o' those rakes an' clean up the shore," said Riddles as he paid the pedler. "It looks as if there'd been a dog fight here."

"I done some grabbin' and chawin' with them shears," the latter answered as he gathered up the hair and threw it into the stream. "Is there anything more I can do for ye?"

Riddles turned and asked the tramp: "Do I want anything more done for me?"

"No, unless you've got a tooth that needs pullin'."

"Couldn't stand no more pullin' to-day," said Riddles. "You can rub a little mud on these garments just to take the new look off 'em—not too much. Just a smear here and there."

The pedler applied the mud, wiping it so as to leave sundry stains on the coat and trousers.

"Now," said Riddles, "I don't want you to do anything more for me. I've had so much done for me now that I'm kind o' shy."

"Well, gents, I'll bid ye good-by," said A. Hinchman as he gathered his tools and hurried up the bank. He drove on down the road, while Riddles helped the tramp with his dressing. The delicate silk undergarments, the shirt of soft gray flannel, the collar, the blue silk string tie, the blue silk socks with their garters, the polished tan shoes—a trifle too large, but still a comfortable fit—had wrought a great change in the look and manners of the tramp. His voice had grown gentler, his face had a friendly look. Riddles enjoyed the magic he had wrought. In a moment the tramp stood dressed under the soft Clyde cap with a glow of high respectability upon him.

Mr. Riddles gave him an admiring survey. He had found a new kind of pleasure in this unusual proceeding. It would be easy for him to get other clothes when he wanted them and, meanwhile, he would not be too respectable to get a job. After a week or so in the fields he would try to find the young lady.

"You'll do," Riddles said. "You look like the friend and guardian of a million dollars."

"Make it ten," said the tramp. "I don't like a crowd."

"All right. Here's a ten," said Riddles as he picked up his wallet. "This manzanito stick of mine with its silver trimmings will help you to keep the wolf away from it."

"You have, indeed, bound up my wounds and poured in oil and wine," said the remade tramp with a look of real gratitude. "What can I do for you?"

"Nothing more," answered Riddles in a tone of gentle irony as he looked down at himself. "Now I should like to know your name and where your home is. You may call me—" Riddles hesitated.

"Why not Reuben Smith," the late tramp suggested.

"All right. I guess that is as good as any name," said Riddles. "What is yours?"

"Let me see—what is my name? Oh! Really! I had quite forgotten to tell you that my name is J. Reginald Travers, of Taviston House, Wrentham above Wrigglesworth, Surrey, England."

These words were spoken with an accent and a manner so perfectly in keeping with the clothes he wore and the rich, old-country flavor of the fictitious name and address he had given that Riddles laughed in astonishment.

"You are some actor!" he exclaimed.

"You see, deah Smith, I have been miscahst," said Travers. "I am now myself—quite myself, deah Smith! I will not lahf at you, but really you do present a most absurd appearance."

"I am so glad," Riddles answered. "I am a little weary of dukes and duchesses and squabs and terrapin and insomnia. I'm going to do as I like for a while. I'm going to hit the hay and breathe its sweetness."

They could hear voices and the sound of motor-cars and the tramp of feet in the grove.

"Ba Jove! It's a picnic party," said Travers. "Deah Smith, it is a Godsend! I find myself in need of refreshment."

"I am as hungry as a bear," said Riddles.

"Leave it to me, old friend. It is a very simple problem in diplomacy. Let us go up the bank together. You stay behind the bushes until I have, in a way, prepared their minds for your—unusual appearance."

RIDDLES regarded the change in the man who stood beside him with growing admiration and astonishment. The cynical, half-defiant tone of the tramp had left him. The facile grace with which he played the part of a genial, well-bred Englishman was the chief cause of Mr. Riddles' astonishment. They went together up the bank. The tramp millionaire concealed himself in a bunch of cedars near the edge of the grove while Travers went on.

"Ah! Pardon me, ladies and gentlemen," Riddles heard him saying in a moment. "I do not mean to intrude upon your privacy. I am an Englishman traveling in America. My car left me here so that I could enjoy a walk through this lovely countryside and take a train when I had grown weary of it. I met an unfortunate man—I believe you would call him a tramp—a quite harmless and engaging fellow, I may say, and was rather touched by his story. I bought him clean clothes from a traveling pedler, gave him a trifle of money and induced him to take a bahth in the river."

Travers' statement was greeted with merry laughter.

"I hope it doesn't kill him," said a man's voice. "He has imposed upon you. The American tramp is a worthless and often a dangerous fellow. We don't waste any sympathy on him in this country."

"I dare say, but I cahn't help thinking, you know, that he is, after all, human," Travers went on. "The worst I can say of the poor fellow is that he detained me far beyond my reckoning. Could you tell me is there a comfortable inn in this parish?"

"The only one you would care to stop at is five miles from here," said a man's voice. "If you will do us the honor to share our picnic supper, we shall be glad to drop you at the inn later."

The invitation was heartily seconded by the other picnickers.

"It is most kind of you," said Travers. "Would you mind ahsking that poor chap who is still—I think—down by the river to take a bite with the chauffeurs? I am sure he would be glad to bring wood for the fire and give us any help he can."

"Not at all," said the feminine voices, and then a man added: "We can fill him up. Tell him to come on."

TRAVERS went to the edge of the high bank and called: "I say—Smith!"

"Here I be!" said Riddles as he emerged from the bushes.

A well-dressed, stout man who stood by the fire of burning twigs roared with laughter at the appearance of "the unfortunate man." Some of the ladies looked at each other and covered their faces as if to indicate that, while they would like to be decently human, it was almost too much to expect under the circumstances. There were four ladies sitting on blankets, very handsome and smartly dressed. Poor Riddles was particularly impressed by one face among them. It was that of a young lady—very gentle and fresh and comely under a wavy crown of thick, dark hair partly covered with a delicate purple veil which fell gracefully about her shoulders. The fact that she had not laughed at him challenged Riddles' eye and he stood looking at her for an instant only. He did not miss the look of sympathy in her face.

"Unmarried and about twenty-three!" he thought. "What a magnificent young woman! It's the time of all others when I should be a gentleman instead of a tramp. I wonder if this is the Martin picnic party."

These thoughts ran through the mind of the dejected Riddles. He was rudely awakened by the voice of the well-dressed, stout, middle-aged man.

"Come, weary Willie!" the latter shouted. "Hustle around here and bring us some wood for the fire."

"All right, mister!" Riddles answered as he set out to gather sticks of wood in the near grove.

"He could wade the river without wetting his pants!" said a young man in a white linen suit as the others laughed.

There were four gentlemen in the party, two young men and two of middle age.

"The poor fellow has had a glorious pahst," Travers was saying in the hearing of Riddles. "Wealth—a good family, and all that! A too generous nature and evil associations brought him down. But—you know—I cahnt help thinking that there is still hope for him."

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Next evening he found them in the meat and grocery market sitting by the stove discussing high prices, the new community house and the killing at Connors.

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"I don't agree with you," said the stout, well-dressed, middle-aged gentleman in a half-whisper. "When wine, women and song have got through with a man, he's hopeless."

"He looks clean, at least," said one of the ladies.

"The pedler sheared off his hair and he's had a bahth with laundry soap," said Travers. "He is quite clean, I am sure."

"Outside!" said the stout, well-dressed gentleman. He turned to Riddles, who was arriving with wood, and asked: "Say, Willie, did you ever broil a steak?"

"Yes, sir," the latter answered.

"Then please wash your hands in that basin and we'll see what you can do."

Riddles had been the chief cook on many a picnic. He had said more than once that the only art with which he felt familiar was that of broiling beefsteak—a remark due to his modesty, or he had a fine bass voice and a gift for the piano unequaled by other amateurs in his city. There were two thick steaks and a package of bacon. He cut the latter into strips and basted the steaks with it and began the broiling. While this was going on the stout, middle-aged gentleman said to Travers:

"I am Erastus Waters of New York and would like to know whom we have the honor of entertaining."

Mr. Travers stepped forward and shook his hand and said: "My name is John Reginald Travers of Taviston House, Wrentham above Wrigglesworth, Surrey, England—a bit of country quite like this—you know—hills and valleys and tall trees and, ah—excellent people."

Mr. Waters presented him to the other members of the party. Riddles did not fail to note that the handsome young lady was Miss Harriet Martin—undoubtedly the girl he was looking for—and that it was her mother, a good-looking woman a little past forty, who sat beside her in a widow's veil. He regretted to learn that the girl's name was Harriet Martin because—well—he was not an ideal ambassador. The smartly dressed, dark-haired youth who had spoken with such disrespect of Riddles' trousers was Percival, the son of Erastus Waters. Then there was a Mr. Corning and his son James and a Mrs. Pulsifer—also in a widow's veil—an elderly lady about sixty years of age, with a very soft and gentle voice. As the supper proceeded, Mrs. Pulsifer elucidated, in tender tones, her view of "ethereal substances" and of the influence of thoughts and names upon human destiny. The others listened with respectful silence, but Riddles could plainly feel its undercurrent of amusement. He had heard Mr. Waters say to Travers that Mrs. Pulsifer was a sister of David Galt, the famous political leader.

THE ladies had been impressed by Mr. Travers. Mrs. Pulsifer rose and spread a blanket for him near where they sat. The steaks were drenched in butter, cut in thin strips and served between slices of bread. All spoke in praise of the skill with which they had been cooked.

"Are you making a long stay in America?" was the question directed at Travers by Mr. Waters.

"Well, you see, I am a bachelor with few responsibilities," the latter answered. "I travel much and always without haste, you know. I shall soon be going to California."

"Have another piece of steak," said Mrs. Pulsifer with a smile.

"The twenty-fourth of June is approaching," said Erastus Waters with a playful wink at Mrs. Pulsifer.

"Good gracious! So it is," she answered. "I wonder if it's to be this one."

"The fates are busy," said Waters.

"What is the meaning of these cryptic words?" Mrs. Martin asked.

"Wait and you may learn," Waters declared.

"It's a secret," said Mrs. Pulsifer. "Mr. Travers, do have some more steak."

"See how polite they are as soon as they learn that you are a bachelor," said Waters.

"If I were to stay long in America, I am sure that I should be quite reformed," said he. "In no part of the world have I found such beautiful and—I may say—engaging women. They are the most kindly and hospitable and altogether, I am sure, the best-hearted lot the sun shines upon—really."

The ladies put down their plates and clapped their hands. Their eating over, Mr. Waters passed his cigar case. The picnic party chatted while Riddles ate with the chauffeurs and helped them with the cleaning up. Presently Travers came and said:

"Smith, Mrs. Martin wishes to speak to you."

Riddles went to the lady in the widow's veil.

"Smith, I am interested in you," she said in a kindly voice. "I need a handy man to help in the garden and the hayfield. Would you care to try it?"

"I enjoy that kind of work and will do my best," Riddles answered.

"You will have a comfortable home," said the woman. "We will arrange about the wages to-morrow."

"I'll leave all that to you, ma'am," Riddles answered in good Yankee dialect.

As the dusk fell the ladies began singing old songs—a diversion in which presently the men joined.

Soon the party gathered up its blankets and left the grove. Riddles was put beside the chauffeur in Mrs. Martin's car. Travers got in with the Cornings and Mrs. Pulsifer and was taken to an inn near her country house.

Chapter Two

The Wealthy Mill-Owner Learns how a Farm becomes a Leech and a Pestilent Source of Enervation and Moral Decay in a Countryside. He applies to the situation a Dose of Honest Frankness.

RIDDLES was shown to a little room over the wood-shed. Its furniture included a chair, a strip of carpet, a bed, a wash-stand with bowl, pitcher, soap and towel and a battered chiffonier, but the room and the furniture were clean, the bed fairly comfortable. Riddles, being weary, had a night of unbroken sleep. He missed his tub in the morning, but made out very well with a sort of bird bath at the rim of the basin of cold water. He had been told to see Mr. Cawkins, the superintendent, at six A.M. and so at that hour Riddles was down-stairs and wandering over the silent and deserted grounds. There were large lawns and gardens and great elms and many handsome shrubs and a big, rambling villa, yellow with white trimmings, set in a broad, fertile valley. Across a level stretch of meadows, half a mile or so from the house, was a range of high hills. It was a pretty bit of country. The house and grounds showed signs of neglect; both had the appearance of being a trifle down at the heel. A blind was loose on the front of the main structure, its veranda columns needed varnish, its eave gutters were eaten out with rust, the shrubs and trees had not been trimmed that summer. No feet were stirring on the place save those of the late Mr. Riddles. After some twenty minutes of looking around he met a tall, lank, middle-aged man in blue overalls coming out of the barn, and asked:

"Is your name Cawkins?"

THE man looked at Riddles and rubbed his long nose with a red handkerchief. Then he brushed aside his bristling, dark mustache, while his keen gray eyes surveyed the figure of the new man.

"Yes, sir—that sounds like my name," he answered.

"I was told to see you at six o'clock, but you were not in sight at that hour," said Riddles. "You may call me Reuben Smith."

"Say, that six o'clock business is like everything else here—a joke," Cawkins declared in a low tone. "The breakfast hour is supposed to be six-thirty. It's that now and not a girl out o' bed. Be you another patient?"

"What do you mean?" Riddles asked.

"Why, this is the darnedest place ye ever see in yer life," Cawkins explained in confidential tone. "It ain't a farm, it's a kind of a health resort. Plenty of amusement an' lots of sleep an' good pay. The patients give me ten per cent. of their wages, an' I kind o' look after 'em—do what I can for their comfort. We all go off to a dance or a movie show every night an', of course, we make sleep while the sun shines—stacks of it. Ain't that a cinch?"

"Movie shows! Where do you find 'em?" Riddles asked.

"Out to the village—four miles from here. That's nothing when you have some Maggie toters an' the right to use 'em."

"What do you do for exercise?" Riddles asked.

"Everything but work. How are you goin' to work for anybody that don't know what work is?"

"I suppose it would be possible to show 'em what it is like an' git 'em gradually used to it," Riddles answered.

"But what's the sense in spoilin' a good thing?" said Cawkins. "She's satisfied. She's even talkin' o' puttin' in a pool-table an' a tennis-court for the help."

"Well, ye know if I wanted to be a fool, I wouldn't need any hired men to help me," said Riddles.

Again Cawkins laughed. "Say, she's a soft-hearted, lady agriculturist, born in a marble palace in the full o' the moon. She's the leading sleeper in this valley. Off somewhere every night. Has her breakfast in bed an' sleeps till one o'clock every day. Never discharges anybody. When I first came here I tried to work. I was goin' to discharge the loafers and get some good help. She wouldn't stand for it. Too soft-hearted. She's spoilt all the servants in the neighborhood. Everybody's help is about like ours. They rest through

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the day and work most o' the night."

"It's a new kind of a school," said Riddles. "I suppose Mrs. Martin can afford it."

"That's just what worries us—we're afraid she can't," Cawkins went on. "We haven't yet got our pay for the last month. We're all ready to quit."

"So am I," said Riddles. "I ain't anxious to git into a nut house, but maybe I belong here. We'll see."

Cawkins went to the men's quarters above the garage and awoke them and was greeted with rude remarks. At seven-thirty Riddles went in to breakfast with the superintendent and four husky farm hands.

"My gosh!" the cook exclaimed as she looked at Riddles. "Haven't I got jays enough to cook for now?"

"Go easy, Maggie," said Cawkins in a soothing voice. "It's only for the hayin' time. He'll be takin' you to a dance one o' these nights."

"That hayseed! Gosh!" Maggie answered while she stood by the door wiping tears from her eyes, as the kitchen-maid threw a dipper into the sink with great violence. Cawkins introduced Mr. Reuben Smith.

"You'll find me willin' an' obligin', Maggie," said Riddles with a smile. "I'm a ray o' sunshine in the kitchen—handy with the scuttle an' know the way to the wood-pile. I always draw the biggest piece o' pie."

Maggie was visibly pleased.

After breakfast Riddles went out into the hayfield with the men. When Cawkins asked him what he would like to do, he expressed a preference for the mowing machine—the part of the haying which he had liked best in his youth. Cawkins was an obliging man, and so the machine, with the late Mr. Riddles in its iron seat, was soon clanging over a great meadow flat, half a mile or so from the house. For him it was a delight to see the grass falling back of the cut-bar and to smell again the dewy morning breath of the meadows. Only one of the men who had come with him was at work—mowing the fence corners with a scythe; the others, Cawkins among them, were lying under the edge of a piece of woods.

THE superintendent and his men had a well-planned system for beating the game. In the back meadow two, and some times three, of them were always lying in the bushes or on a swath of hay while the others were at work. They slept by turns, one calling the other when his time was up and taking his place on the flowery bed of ease. These conditions were new to Mr. Riddles. They excited his interest. The haymakers of his boyhood had worked with a mighty zest. These were different. All save Cawkins were foreign born. He learned that day that three of these farmhands had been in the army in France. They had grown accustomed to long periods of idleness, and had not recorded normal habits of work.

Riddles went with the servants that evening in one of the Ford cars, kept for their use, to the village of Coulterville. It was a village of some three thousand inhabitants. He did not care to go to the movie show and the dance which was to follow it in the Town Hall, so he did a little shopping. After which he went with Cawkins to the big meat and grocery market. There the superintendent introduced him to Sam Bullwether, the chief clerk. Riddles sat down in a comfortable chair with his pipe after Cawkins had left to go to the movie show. For nearly an hour he read the New York paper which he had bought at a bookstore. Before he had finished his reading the market was deserted save by Sam Bullwether, who seemed to be getting ready to close the doors and go home.

"Have a cigar—straight from a rich guy?" Riddles asked.

"You bet I will," the clerk answered as he took the long corona which Riddles drew from his pocket. "I never saw one like that before—Porto Rico, I guess. Wait till I lock the doors an' we'll set down an' have a smoke before I go home."

WHEN the clerk returned, Riddles remarked: "I suppose there are a good many rich guys around here."

"They've come here an' grabbed the hills an' valleys an' shoved a lot o' roofs into the air," the clerk answered as he lighted his cigar. "We git all their trade."

"An' purty good prices," Riddles suggested.

"Anything we want to ask—the sky is the limit. They don't spend money; they just shovel it out—like unloadin' a ton o' coal. It's done by hired men—there's so much of it to handle."

"Kind o' heavy work."

"Well, ye see, they don't bother with the marketin'—haven't time. Generally it's the cook or the butler or the housekeeper or the superintendent, an' the bigger the bill the better they like it."

"Of course, they get a rake-off."

"Most of 'em! They git theirs, in cash, too, accordin' to the amount o' the bill an' sometimes we have to wait a year for our money an' plenty often we git beat out of it. The swell guys hate to give up. Sometimes, when they pay, you can hear their shrieks for a mile."

Riddles laughed.

"I don't know as I blame 'em," the clerk went on. "They've been bled an' they know it—the poor suckers! They've got to be bled. We have to get ours while the goin' is good. Everybody bleeds us, the wholesaler, the tailor, the drygoods merchant, the carpenter, the plumber. I guess the rich guy does his share o' bleedin' the other feller. We're all in it."

"I wonder how long it will be before we are a bloodless nation," Riddles said as he filled his pipe again.

"It's hard on the poor devils, like me, that's workin' for a salary—clerks an' schoolma'ams an' town officers. The plumber soaked me plenty for a job he done up at the house. The rich guys will pay him anything he asks an' I have to pay the same."

"How is the rich guy to help himself?" Riddles asked. "You fellers decide how much profit you want to make an' fix yer price an' he has to pay it. Why don't you take guns an' go out on the road an' be honest, straightforward robbers? It's a sneakin' kind of a business you do. You pretend to be honest men an' hold up the whole community. You make the rich man holler, but you break the backs o' the poor."

"The rich are so foolish—they pay more'n they need to," the clerk went on. "Now you take that woman you're workin' for. She's a real nice woman. It's a pleasure to wait on her, but she don't come in here more'n twice in a summer. If she did her own buyin' and used judgment about it, she'd save a lot. The girl comes in every week or so. Say, she's a peach! The best looker in the whole bunch an' talks just like a human bein' an' funny—say, I'd rather talk with her ten minutes than see Charley Chaplin!"

"I wonder why she don't get married," said Riddles.

"Well, sir, I guess she's hard to please. That girl ought to have a real man an' they're all at work these days, all except ol' Waters' boy, Percy. He's just foolin' around here in the country, but he ain't got no show with her."

"Why?"

"Little tin god! Knows it all an' then some more! Kind of a Kaiser William, runnin' a one-man world! Nobody likes him. Killed a cow with his big racin' car the other night an' slammed himself into a ditch an' busted a front wheel. Had a woman with a starched face in with him—a kind of a high stepper from New York, whose husband is in the army an' hasn't got home yet. Hank Thompson picked 'em up and brought 'em to Brown's drug-store. They said Percy was half drunk. Only had a few scratches; but she had to go to the hospital. His father paid for the cow and gave Hank twenty dollars to keep his tongue still. That young feller ain't no match for Harriet Martin, I can tell ye that. If she marries him, it'll be because she has to."

"Why should she have to?" Riddles asked.

"WELL, I'll tell ye, ol' Waters has money to burn. Percy is the only child an' I shouldn't wonder if the widow Martin was a little hard up. That farm as it's run now would break anybody—give it time enough. Waters may get control of 'em. He owns this store an' the First National Bank an' the hardware store an' The Farmer's Supply Company an' the Lakeside Hotel. High prices don't hurt his feelin's a bit. Over at the Lakeside you have to put up two dollars and fifty cents for a beefsteak."

"Is there any good reason for that?" Riddles asked.

The clerk smiled and said with a knowing look: "Well, I believe the beef trust owns four hundred thousand dollars' worth of the stock of the hotel company. I hear that they've got the same kind of a cinch on most of the big hotels in America."

"That means that the beef trust cuts out competition in selling meat to big hotels and can help fix the price on the bill of fare," Riddles mused.

"They handle meat, poultry, eggs, fish an' groceries," Bullwether answered.

"They've got the world by the gizzard," said Riddles. "Still an honest store could do a lot for the poor gizzards of Coulterville."

"Wait 'til I start mine," the clerk answered.

The town clock struck eleven. Riddles rose from his chair.

"I'm due at the post-office door," he remarked. "We've had a good talk."

"Don't say a word of what I've told ye," said the clerk as he let Riddles out of the front door.

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Riddles broiled the steak when the maid, who was not accustomed to cooking, burnt her hand.

"Not a word," Riddles answered.

He waited in front of the post-office for nearly half an hour before the two Ford cars arrived with their party of industrious fun seekers.

Next evening he found old David Galt sitting by the stove with Sam Bullwether. Galt was a big, stout man with a white mustache and chin lock. He had a large, ruddy face and gray eyes. He whittled a piece of pine as he talked. He was dressed in black with a low-cut vest, a broad expanse of white shirt-front adorned with a diamond stud, and a long frock coat. His old-fashioned low collar held a white string tie.

"I'VE lived seventy years in this country," he was saying, "and we have found no trouble in maintaining law and order until these radical foreigners came among us. The meanest thing that has happened here in years is the killing at Connors."

"That criminal ought to be punished," said Sam.

"Yes sir; we should make an example of him. But where is he? He's disappeared like magic. We have offered a reward of five hundred dollars for his apprehension, but nothing has come of it."

His talk was interrupted by the entrance of a rugged-looking man dressed in coarse gray clothes under a gray felt hat. His full, sandy beard was streaked with gray. His gray eyes were deep-set under shaggy gray brows. He was an undersized man who walked as if he had been accustomed to heavy burdens.

"Hello, Silas!" said David Galt in a cheerful tone, as he slashed a stout sliver from the pine stick. "I hope you're going to give us something toward the new community house."

"Not a cent!" snapped the newcomer. "We're taxed to death now."

"But think of what we get for it," said Galt.

"What—I'd like to know?"

"Better health, more comfort, good roads, good government."

"I don't call it good government when a man can kill another an' git away without bein' punished. As to yer roads, they're nothin' but a thoroughfare for fools who waste their time on 'em. I've swore that I'll never set a foot on them roads. If I did, I wouldn't expect to git off 'em alive. As to health an' comfort, there's less of it than there ever was in this community with the automobiles racin' an' tootin' an' killin' folks."

The speaker had gathered his beard in his hand and was hanging on to it as if it were the tether of his disposition. Turning to Sam Bullwether with a look of injury, the newcomer said:

"I want a pound o' crackers an' a half a pound o' cheese."

"Robbery!" he growled as he paid for the packages. He retired from the store without speaking again. Mr. Galt followed him with a smile and a wink.

"That was old Silas Gaylor," said Sam. "He's a queer one. Worth at least a quarter of a million dollars. Used to run a sawmill. Growls every time he gives up a cent. Had a quarrel with his brother Bill twenty years ago over the ownership of an old umbrella and hasn't spoken to him since. They pass each other on the street every day."

Just then Ab Risley, the village drunkard, came into the store and sat down.

"What you been doin' to old Sile Gaylor?" he asked of Sam Bullwether.

"BEEN chargin' him twenty cents for some crackers and cheese."

"The way he's growlin' an' hangin' on to his whiskers is something awful," said Risley. "I'm glad we've got high prices. I like to hear these old dubs holler. It's got 'em all on a cracker an' cheese diet. Maybe it'll kill 'em off. He looks kind o' scrawny. One night when I was broke an' settin' in the park I fell asleep an' dreamed that Sile Gaylor came along an' give me five cents. It scairt me so I rolled off the bench an' skinned my forehead on the side of a tree. It was one o' the meanest things that Sile ever did. Ol' Black Mary found me there with blood on my face. She wet her handkerchief in the fountain an' cleaned me up an' took me over to the dog wagon an' fed me. She ain't got much money, but I think she's worth more than any other person in this village, not exceptin' Sile Gaylor. It does me good to hear the skinflints holler. I tell ye, me an' Rat Waters have done a lot for this place."

Mr. Risley referred to Erastus Waters, the wealthy merchant and inn-keeper. It was a habit of his to speak of "me an' Rat Waters."

"How so?" Mr. Bullwether asked.

"We give folks somethin' to talk about. Now, I've got an idea that ought to be a help. It beats the League o' Nations all holler. It'll put a stop to war absolutely."

"What's your idea?" the clerk inquired.

"Make a law that nobody under forty can fight in a war. That'll kill off the old duffers that have lived long enough. Then every year we'll have an Expectoration Day, when we can all go an' spit on their graves."

"Well, Ab, you better go home an' sleep it off," said Bullwether as he made ready to close the store.

"Oh, idees ain't like whisky," said Ab as he started for the door. "When ye git drunk on idees it's permanent. Ye never draw another sober breath."

To the end of that week Riddles went on with his work in the hay-field while the other men devoted their days to recuperation. Every evening he went down to Coulterville in one of the Maggie toters and had a smoke and a talk with Sam Bullwether. Henry Bradshaw, the young school superintendent, had sat with them one evening for an hour or so and had had a part in their talk.

"There are a good many farms around

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here," said Riddles. "What becomes of their product?"

"It is millionaired," said Bradshaw.

"What do you mean?"

"That it's mostly wasted," Bradshaw went on. "The rich folks don't want to be bothered by raising stuff for market. It would be bad form. So when they get a farm they play with it. They put it out of business. It becomes just a big strip of scenery—a site for saddle trails, an arena in which man and master devote themselves to killing time. Even the land becomes an idler. It does nothing to relieve the pressure of scarcity and high prices. You work on Mrs. Martin's farm—one of the best in the countryside. What do you suppose has become of its products in the last two or three years?"

"I guess there ain't been any," said Riddles.

"You're about right," Bradshaw went on. "Instead of contributing a share of the necessaries of life, it has become a consumer devouring the substance of its owner and breaking down the habit of industry and right thinking in its employees."

When Bradshaw went out of the store Riddles followed him. They walked together through the village park.

"Do you like Sam Bullwether?" Riddles asked.

"Everybody likes Sam" the teacher answered. "Talks too much, but he's an honest, hard-working man."

"Would you care to take another school at double the salary you've been getting?"

"I would," said Bradshaw. "I can't live on the salary I've been getting and have refused to sign for another year."

"I've been sizing you up, and I've decided that you're a man that can be trusted and that you ought to have a bigger job. If you will promise to respect my confidence, I will lay my plan before you."

"I promise," said Bradshaw.

They sat down on a bench in the park and had a long talk which was interrupted by a woman well past middle age who was neatly dressed in black.

"God bless you, gentlemen," she said in a pleasant voice. "Would you give me something for the poor?"

They gave and she passed on.

"Who is that," Riddles asked.

"SHE is called Black Mary—a woman with an unfortunate past. Some say that she is not quite sound mentally. She has a good heart and really helps a lot of poor people, including herself, with the money she begs."

The clock struck eleven.

"I must look up the Maggie toters," said Riddles as he rose from the bench. "I'll meet you here to-morrow evening at eight-thirty."

He had been planning a revolution, and next morning, bright and early, he got it under way.

It was a still, clear Saturday morning. Cawkins was twenty minutes late in getting out of his room.

"There's a lot of hay down and we ought to get it under cover before Sunday," said Riddles to him.

"Don't let that worry you," Cawkins answered gruffly.

The other men who had just come down from their quarters stood near him.

"I've got somethin' that belongs to you," said Riddles with a look at Cawkins.

"What's that?" the latter asked.

"A piece of information," Riddles went on in a kindly voice. "It ought to be worth a lot to you, but I ain't goin' to charge ye a cent for it. Everybody knows it but you. Looks as if folks had been tryin' to keep it from ye. There's been a death in your family."

"What!" Cawkins exclaimed. "Who's dead?"

"Your soul," Riddles answered calmly.

"What do ye mean?" Cawkins demanded.

Riddles answered very gently as he whittled with his jack-knife.

"I mean that you're a crook—a dirty, disreputable, damn crook. It wouldn't matter so much, but you are makin' crooks o' these men. If they were in the army they would be led out and shot for desertion in the face of the enemy and for sleepin' at their posts. They would deserve it. You are turning them into criminals. It's just as bad to steal this woman's time as to steal her money."

For half a moment Cawkins was dumb with astonishment. Riddles's masterly self-possession had floored him. There was no room for argument as to the facts stated. If Riddles's manner had been loud and quarrelsome Cawkins would, in some fashion, have had it out with him on the spot. But the new man had made him feel like clay in the hands of the potter.

"WHAT are ye goin' to do about it?" he demanded under his breath.

"Goin' to be very nice to ye," said Riddles in the same gentle tone. "Goin' to give ye a chance to reform an' live honest an' put in a day's work for a day's pay. If you refuse to do that, I'll have a talk with the madam."

"You can go plumb to hell!" said Cawkins angrily.

"Now don't keep pointin' the wrong way—like a misplaced sign-board," Riddles answered.

Suddenly Miss Harriet Martin stepped out of the wood-shed and confronted the group of men. She was dressed for the saddle. Riddles enjoys telling his friends of the freshness and beauty of her face, of the erectness of her figure and of the indignation in her dark eyes as she stood before them.

"I was drawing on my boots in the shed where Mary had polished them," said the young lady. "I couldn't help hearing your talk." She turned to Riddles and added: "Reuben Smith, I thank you and shall always be grateful to you. We have known of the shameless conduct of these men. But we have not known what to do about it. I shall ask my mother to put you in charge of them."

"If you believe that liar, we will walk out to-day—the whole force—women an' men," Cawkins threatened.

"Miss Martin, if I was you I would say, 'Walk!' " said Riddles.

The young lady turned to Cawkins and said, "Walk!" in the same quiet tone that Riddles had used.

The whole force left that morning. Only Mrs. Martin's maid remained. The chauffeur took them to Coulterville. Riddles hired a neighbor, whose haying was finished, to clean up the meadow flat.

Chapter Three

The Young Millionaire, having won the Confidence of his Employers and being Highly Sympathetic, Becomes a Useful Butler, and Interests Himself in the Welfare of a Young Lady and Her Mother. He Learns also of the Plans and Profiteering of Erastus Waters and Lays a Plan of His Own.

"WE HAVE decided to give you a room in the house now that the maids are gone," Mrs. Martin said to Riddles on his return. "You will have a bath and books to read if you care for them. Come, I will show it to you."

"The bath will be kind o' soothin'," said Riddles as he followed her.

When they had come to the room she added: "Here are some clothes and boots which belonged to my husband. I wish you would try them on and let us see how you look. Would you mind?"

"Not a bit," Riddles answered.

"Try the riding-breeches and the gray coat. When you are ready, come down to the sun parlor."

There were a number of suits of clothes and undergarments hanging in the closet. There were soft, flannel shirts and collars and neckties on the chiffonier. Riddles took a luxurious bath and put on clean underclothes and the riding costume of the late Mr. Martin, all of which fitted him fairly well.

"My word!" Miss Harriet exclaimed as he entered the sun parlor. "I wouldn't know him."

"Nor I. He's quite a different man," said Mrs. Martin. "If you don't mind, I wish you would help my maid with the luncheon. Mr. Waters is going to be here and we'll have to make out the best we can. After luncheon I want you to ride down to Bellemead with Harriet and try to get a cook."

Riddles broiled the steak while the maid baked the crust for the shortcake and heated a can of soup. The maid, who was not accustomed to cooking, burnt her hand in the oven and was not able to do the serving.

"Don't worry, ma'am. I'll jump in and do my best," Riddles said to Mrs. Martin when the latter came into the kitchen.

He was an admirable butler. That dining-room had never seen a more perfect or a more dignified service. As the luncheon progressed Mrs. Martin told of her troubles. She had had bad luck in speculation. Her debts were pressing.

"How much do you owe on this place?" Waters asked.

"Thirty-five thousand dollars and the other debts are as much more. But my equity in the New York house is more than enough to cover them."

"I'd sell this place," said Waters. "It's an elephant on your hands. It has been walking on you. Get rid of it. Put it up at auction, then nobody can complain of the price it brings."

"I am in love with this farm," said Harriet with a look of alarm.

"I'll bid it in and see that it brings enough to pay the debts," Waters answered. "If anybody will pay you more, I'll meet them. Then you can live here as long as you like and have no trouble

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with the details of management. I'll build a farmhouse and put a man here to look after it. I could use the produce in my stores at Coulterville and Nutwood."

About three o'clock Riddles and Miss Harriet Martin set out for Bellemead. He was an admirable rider, as the young lady was quick to observe.

"Smith, is there anything that you can not do?" she asked. "You are a mysterious man. We don't know what to make of you."

"Don't try to make anything of me—my father tried that long ago and failed. Then I took up the job and have made—some whiskers and a few resolutions."

"And at least two friends and a capital likeness of Uncle Sam," said Miss Harriet. "I'd love to see you dressed for the part. If you don't object, I'm going to call you Uncle Sam, Jr."

"Go ahead. I don't mind being your uncle—if—if you need one and will be kind to me."

THEY were near the grove where Riddles had given away his clothes. In a cornfield, nearly opposite, he saw a scarecrow dressed in the faded, ragged and familiar garments of the tramp, which had been left on the river shore. It was crowned with the old straw hat. They rode on to the thriving little city where they found that there were no servants to be had on short notice.

"Never mind, I have a very good plan," said Riddles as they started back.

"What is it?" Miss Harriet asked.

"I'll lay out the work and each will have his job and we'll all get busy. You see there will be no one sleeping in the hay meadow and coming up to meals. I'll cook the beefsteaks if you'll agree to keep your temper while you're eating 'em. Also, I will do the marketing and mind the garden. Mary can do the waiting and the down-stairs work."

"And mother and I will attend to the chambers. I love to work. I had thought of your plan but, honestly, I didn't dare to propose it."

"Why?"

"For fear you'd give notice and quit."

"Now that I see you're willin' to do your share, I give notice that I shall not quit until your trouble has backed up an' turned around an' begun to move away."

"I'd love to know how it happened that you became a tramp farmer," the young lady remarked after a little silence.

"That is not a tale for the saddle. It would be dangerous. You'd need to have both feet on the ground an' somethin' to lean on. Besides, you wouldn't believe it until—until you know me better. I can hardly believe it myself. Some time, on a rainy day, I'll tell you the story."

When they rode up to the gate young Percy Waters was standing there. He assisted Miss Harriet to dismount and greeted Riddles with these words:

"Smitty, you look like a new man. Why don't you cut that bunch of whiskers off your chin?"

"That's my fool catcher," said Riddles as he took out a pencil and began to make an entry in a little memorandum book. "It's somethin' like the cowcatcher on a locomotive. Ye see when a man gits careless at the muzzle end of a set of whiskers an' didn't know they was loaded, he's it. Every time I meet one I put down a straight mark. This time I guess I'll put down two—'cause there's some that counts double."

Miss Harriet laughed as Percy changed color. The young man was filled with confusion while Riddles rode away with the horses.

"I sure got mine—didn't I?" said Percy.

"You sure did!" the young lady answered. "That fellow is some man, believe me."

Then she told of Riddles's talk with Cawkins and of his work in the kitchen and dining-room.

That evening Riddles drove to Coulterville in one of the Ford cars. There he found a letter, sent in care of Mrs. Martin, which has its bearing on the events of this little history. This is the letter:

> DEAR SMITH: I am in the way of getting a fine job—just the one of all others for which I am qualified by nature and education. God knows I dislike to ask you for more help, but a trifle of one hundred dollars—for while it is much to me, I can not help thinking that it is a trifle to you—would clear the way for me to success. It would help me to go forward, a wiser man with all my errors behind me. You are my only friend and I have a sublime faith in your goodness, dear Smith. Do not fail me and I promise you an achievement worthy of your patience.
>
> Sincerely yours,
> J. REGINALD TRAVERS.

Riddles bought a check from Bullwether and sent it on that night with a note which said:

> DEAR TRAVERS: I enclose the check you ask for. I am not easily discouraged. I hope that the investment will turn out well, and that whatever your past has been there will be no mistakes in the future.
>
> Sincerely,
> SMITH.

Riddles learned that evening from Bullwether that the man Cawkins had been spreading evil gossip regarding Mrs. Martin and her daughter and hinting at dark thoughts regarding the intimacy of the latter with the new hired man. The disguised mill-owner was indignant. Until after ten o'clock he sat in the store with a group of men who were exchanging reminiscences of the village.

"It ought to be called Thief Center," said Ezra Jenkins, a retired farmer with a full beard. "There are more pious, unconvicted thieves in this place than in any other part of the uncivilized world. The worst part of it is they don't suspect themselves. They're so busy watchin' other folks that the real criminal gets away with the goods right under their eyes. I cal'late that a man who is a thief an' don't know it is worse off than one that's better informed."

"What do you mean?" asked the Reverend Horace Wells, the young Presbyterian minister.

"I mean the folks who keep borryin' things an' never give 'em back—or take all the value out of 'em before ye see 'em again," Mr. Jenkins answered.

"That's right! Yes, sir!" exclaimed a chorus of voices.

"Why, one feller borry'd my wheelbarrer an' busted it an' patched it up a little an' sent it back—spoilt," Mr. Jenkins went on. "A woman borry'd a pound o' butter an' sent back some that was so bad we couldn't use it. Another woman borry'd seventy-five cents an' has been three years tryin' to think to pay it back an' ain't succeeded yet, an' she's well off, too."

"I've had all kinds o' things borry'd from me—umbrellas an' saws an' rakes an' augers an' gimlets an' hammers an' a real split-bamboo fish-rod," said Henry Silcock, the village carpenter.

"An' never seen 'em ag'in," said the pessimistic Mr. Jenkins.

"Oh yes, I have—I've seen 'em often in the other feller's hands," Mr. Silcock affirmed. "Once I asked a man for a saw o' mine that he was usin' an' he was so mad he ain't spoke to me since."

"There's a town in the West where, once a year, they have what they call a 'Take-It-Back Day,'" said the Reverend Wells. "Every one goes over his effects carefully and takes back what has been borrowed. If he can not remember where he borrowed it he takes it to the village park where its owner may find and claim it. It is a kind of 'Tell-the-Truth Day'—a day of public confession, a day of forgiving and good will. If any man has wronged his neighbo he can take it back and clean his conscience if he wishes to do so. Of course, it's a great chance for the ministers. They go to work and get the town ready for this day of days. It would be a salutary experience for the village of Coulterville."

"Why don't you try it?" the new hired man asked.

"I've been thinking of that," Mr. Wells answered. "I'm going to get the other ministers together and talk it over."

When Riddles left the store that evening he went to a certain bench in the park where he had an appointment with Henry Bradshaw. In the course of their talk the former said:

"I wish you would have a talk with the Reverend Wells about his plan for a Take-It-Back Day. Tell him you have a friend of means who likes the idea and will do what he can to help." Their talk was interrupted by the thorny tongue of Ab Risley, who came along laughing as if he were having a good time with himself.

"Say, me and Rat Waters have got some job on our hands," he declared. "Percy has been up to his tricks ag'in."

"What has Percy been doing?" Bradshaw asked.

"TOOK a couple o' gals over to Spellman's an' got 'em drunk an' had an awful careless time. Me an' the ol' man have been flyin' around to-day an' have got it all hushed up. One o' the gals is over to Black Mary's an' is purty sick. Don't you say a word. We've spent hundreds o' dollars to keep it quiet."

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Waters left one leak in the pail," Bradshaw said to Riddles as they left the park together. "That leak was Ab Risley. He knows all the undercurrents of our life."

"Is Percy really so bad?" Riddles asked.

"He is the limit," Bradshaw answered. "Yet, his father's wealth and influence have kept him from disgrace. He moves in the best society."

To be concluded in the June EVERYBODY'S.

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He put on the hooded cloak and preened himself. "Now is Bran a learned clerk. Yea, Yea."

The Fool

Tale of an Empress

By H. C. Bailey

HERE is the first of a series of romances of medieval England, all having to do with the adventures of one Bran, a jester, who beneath his fool's cap and motley conceals a resourceful wit and a great heart. In these tales of "moving accidents by flood and field," Mr. Bailey draws an enchanting picture of the Middle Ages—a richly colorful period that has come to be almost synonymous with romance.

THERE were dead in the courtyard, and a noise. Across the morning twilight men shouted from tower to tower and blade clashed on mail where the last of the garrison sold blood for blood, and already from the bowels of the castle came the yells and crash of plundering. And the bells of the abbey beyond the wall were ringing to matins.

Only one man was alive among the dead in the courtyard, and he sat on his heels in a corner and played knuckle-bones. He flared in the grayness, one lean thigh scarlet and one grass-green, his doublet a patchwork in all colors, about his neck and his big head a hood like a monk's cowl, but yellow, and the crest of it was red and fashioned as a cock's comb, and out of the sides came the gray, rough ears of an ass. While his big hands tossed and snatched the bones, he was singing a Latin hymn. From the battlements a man was thrown and fell beside him and lay with blood oozing through the rings of the hauberk. But he did not move or look; he tossed the bones still and still sang.

The storming-party mustered again, a sturdy, swaggering company, begrimed and with many a gap hewn in their mail coats; for their armor was rings or little scraps of steel, like a fish's scales, sewn upon cloth. That a man could wear steel plates no man had yet found out; it was the year of the Lord 1140. You remember that Stephen was then fighting to be king of England, and his cousin Matilda, who had been an empress in Germany when she was a child, fought to be queen, and all the country was ravaged by their wars and by the barons who throve upon their wars. From sea to sea in England there was no law; what a man could not hide, the sword took from him; what could be hidden, torture dragged from him, and over many a shire there was no meat, nor milk, nor corn for common folk, and they lived in holes upon acorns and beech-mast like swine.

Odo le Veneur was made to prosper in such a time. You see him, a hulking, big-bodied man in bright mail, the long nose-piece of his helmet shadowing all his face but the fat jowl. He came down to the courtyard and roared at his men.

"Splendor of God!"—he gave out that he was a base-born son of the Red King and he liked to swear the Conqueror's oath—"You grow slow, dogs!" He strode past, looking them over, and laughed. "The boars have gored you. Go to, do your will," and they scattered to plunder. Odo took off his helmet and showed a bloated red face and lank black hair, and shouted for wine. The man in the corner still played knuckle-bones.

Odo put out a foot to kick him over, but the man fell on his hands and threw a somersault.

"Why, cousin Odo," said he with a wide grin. "Cousin Odo, we have stormed heaven this morning and I bring you the keys of the gate," and he held out his knuckle-bones.

"Bones, fool?"

"Why, yes, cousin; man's bones, woman's bones. Nought else will open heaven to any man."

"Out on you! Do you play with man's bones?"

"Even as you, cousin. What else are they good for in this world?" He threw a

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somersault backward and sat down on his heels and went on playing.

Hours after he was there still when from the hall Odo shouted "Bran! Bran!" He picked himself up, he picked up a shapeless thing beside him, which being blown out revealed itself as a small bagpipe and, playing upon it a jerky tune, he danced into the hall, an odd sight; for his fool's habit clothed a frame very lean and very short, yet with broad shoulders, a huge head, big hands and big feet, and he showed them off in a jig. This vastly amused Odo and his men, who stopped their eating and bade him do it again and again, till he fell upon hands and knees and ran about like a dog, and like a dog whined for food and scraped at Odo's knees and, putting his head on one side, looked up at him plaintively and licked his chops and dribbled and made more queer dog's noises.

Then Odo, swearing that he was the king of fools, flung him a bone, and he ran after it and growled, and thereafter picked himself up and sat down by the little table on Odo's left hand. He cut himself a trencher of bread like the rest and snatched slices of meat which another had cut and began to eat, using all his fingers. Then, "Pledge me in a cup of wine, cousin," he said and giggled. "What, knaves, wine for my lord!" and when the steward came with a pitcher he snatched it. "The cup for the lord, but the jug for the Fool," he cried and drank. Odo cuffed at him, and he fell over and waggled his great feet in the air. Then he sat down and ate again, and after a while, humming a glee, began to make his bread-platter into little dolls.

"What are you at, fool?" said Odo after a while.

"Why cousin, I am like the good God. I make men and women for man to eat." He swept up the dolls and gulped them all down. "God rest their souls," quoth the Fool.

Then they made him dance again and juggle with knives, till at last he seemed to stab himself and fall backward out of the door and made the death-rattle, and was gone.

Out of the castle and down the hill he went. The Fool was fool enough to like to be alone. See him, if you please, throwing back his hood and dipping his shaven head in the river, see him wandering in the green desert of the countryside, laughing to himself, preaching to the willow herb and the ragged robin and barking like a fox till a fox answered him and he found a litter of cubs at play. But the next thing that matters is that, scrambling down a hill, he came upon a cave in the oolite and a boy looking out of it, a sturdy, bold boy, young in his teens, who laid hold of him and said, "Whose man are you, fellow?"

HE GIGGLED. "Bran does not know that. Bran is a poor fool. But we are all God's people, lord."

A girl came up behind the boy, a little his elder by the look of her body, but with a wiser, sterner face. "He lies, Jocelin. All fools lie."

"Na, na, na," said Bran. "None but fools tell truth. None but fools keep troth. An alms for the fool, great lady." He fell on his knees and put out his hands.

She dashed them aside. "Rogue, you are some rich lord's man. See his silver chain, Jocelin."

"Chains are chains. God save all. Pity the poor fool. Sir Odo le Veneur is my lord, lady."

"Jocelin!" she plucked out the knife from her girdle. The boy held her hand. "He will tell of us. He must not go back."

"It were shame to kill a fool," the boy said.

The Fool laughed. "Mercy was ever a man," said he. "And wisdom is a woman. Strike, and I give you my blessing." He flung back his head and opened his arms—then sprang up. "No! God forgive me, who tempted a child." And he crossed himself and muttered a prayer. "Do I believe that? Why, care killed the cat." And he laughed so queerly that the girl shrank away and made the sign against the evil eye. "Na, na, never fear. Bran is not a wicked one. The more fool Bran."

"SWEAR that you will not tell on us," said the boy, catching his wrist.

"By oak and ash and thorn I swear, yea and by the blood on the Holy Crown."

"That is a great oath."

"A great and terrible oath, lord. And thereafter a man must eat and be strong again." Into the cave he came past the bewildered boy, squatted down and took from his scrip a gammon of bacon and bread and cut. "Bran's pouch never goes empty till Bran's paunch is back by the larder. Eat, lady."

"I am not hungry, fool."

His long finger shot out. "Swear it! Na, na. Bran knows when a body is hungry. Bran has seen."

Eat they did then, and eating loosed tongues. They wanted to know if the castle of Malmesbury was taken and what had befallen the garrison.

"It is well with them. They are dead," said Bran, and saw the children look at each other with fierce eyes. "Whose kin are ye?" And they told him. They were the children of Sir Jocelin Longuemain, who had held the castle for the Bishop of Salisburry; but he died in his bed in the spring. When Odo summoned the castle at nightfall, their father's steward had thrust them out by the postern and bade them take sanctuary in the abbey. But the abbey would not open to their knocking, and they ran away to hide.

"The drowsy knave monks," said Bran. "Eh, eh, cousin Odo will wake them. Not a saint sleeps sound with Odo to neighbor. Patience, patience, my lord and my lady, the monkery will pay." So they asked him what his lord Odo was like. "Saw ye ever a pig loose in a garth? What does he do? He eats the herbs, yea, and what he does not eat, that he roots up and defiles. Even such is my cousin Odo."

"And you serve such an one!" said the girl.

"Pity the poor fool, Lady Judith," Bran whined.

"A man may be a fool, yet have a man's spirit," and she rated him fiercely for serving a robber lord, a knight unknightly, a hunter of the weak, a foreigner, till the fool broke out in that queer laugh of his:

"Foreign? Nenny, nenny, foreign are you all. The Saxon was before the Norman, and the Briton was before the Saxon, and before the Briton was my folk, yea, before Sir Brut the Trojan came. For we are the living earth, the clay and the chalk and the old, old stone, and it was a Saxon churl slew my mother with his spear in the thicket above Monken Risborough, and I only am left that I know. Bran the fool. Only the land, the old land and I." He thrust at them with his big feet and laughed again. "Away, new folk!"

The children drew together. "You—that knife is iron?" the boy said.

"Aha! Yea, lord, iron; and yea, there is salt in the meat. Both the salt and the iron are my friends. No goblin I am, no fairy man. Born of woman I was, and body of man I am. Nought but a fool, lord."

Perhaps they did not thoroughly believe him. They became curious about him, yet with a certain reverence, and talk came fast. They asked him a thousand things and his advice. Odo was King Stephen's man; but it was no order of Stephen's to seize on Malmesbury. That was Lord Odo's private venture. He was sent forth to watch the roads for the empress. What should they do, the children? Lie close, close. The castle was a bishop's castle and no arm so long as the arm of Holy Church. Wait a while. And while they talked and the light waned came from the valley the call of a woman, a long, despairing cry. The boy started up and ran out.

"Oh the mass! Lie close, say I, and off goes he. Who hath trouble enough ever goes to seek it."

Up the steep in the twilight came Jocelin, tottering, panting, so heavily the woman leaned upon him, and as they drew near the cave she swayed and stumbled and fell upon her face and lay still. The Fool rolled her over and the children stood aghast. "She had ridden her horse to death," Jocelin gasped. "She asked food for the love of God."

"NOW God have mercy," the Fool muttered, peering at her.

"Why, is she dead?" Judith cried.

"Nenny, nenny," says he, and tweaked the woman's nose and laughed wildly and tweaked it again and fell to beating her hands. She sneezed, she grasped at the air and sat up, and he slipped his knee behind her.

"Wine, a cup of wine," she said faintly.

"Water is our wine, goody," he laughed.

"Who speaks?"

"A poor fool, goody."

"I am well served," she said. She was tall and largely made. Years and passion or care had furrowed her brow. Her cloak was deep in dust, but of rich blue cloth with broideries, and in it the gleam of a golden chain.

The boy brought her water in his cap and she made a wry face and drank, and they fed her on bread and bacon, and though she looked at it queerly, she said grace for it. "As dark as it is, a fool can tell you have an eye, goody," Bran said.

She was pleased and laughed. "Whose folk are ye?"

"Na, na, goody. You are upside down."

"How, fool?"

"Thus, by mine honor: 'tis the guest gives a name, not the host."

"Here is deep policy! Why, then, sirrah, men call me Grandam Mold, and I am a landless woman this day."

Bran lay back against the rock and looked at the children and laid his finger on his lip. Then, making a chant of it, he droned out:

"And well met then and very well met

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are Grandam Mold and we; for these be orphans and outcasts, and I am a fool, you see."

"Ay, now am I come to my kingdom," she said. "You are right to be merry, Fool."

"Why, yea, goody, even as thorns do right to crackle in the fire. What now? What now?" There were horsemen riding in the valley and not keeping the track, but ranging wide and calling to each other. "Keep close now, you, or you are sped."

"Close, quotha? I could not move a yard to shun the fiend," the woman said, but Bran was gone.

It was not yet quite dark and a full moon rising red above the hills. So in the valley all things looked vague and treacherous, and the horsemen came on slowly, beating hither and thither. Then rose a long-drawn howl, a howl as of a creature in pain, yet with some wicked mirth in it, and it echoed from hill to hill, and while still the echoes rang came another that seemed to answer it and another.

The shouts of the horsemen were hushed and they drew together and halted, and through the stillness came the murmur of an anxious parley. Then, keeping close, they pushed on. Again the howling echoed, there was cawing and screaming and a rustle of wings as a pair of ravens, roused from their nests, hurtled through the air in angry fear. If they were ravens and not more evil things; for there on the lump of rock above the river was some creature neither human nor beast, a strange, shapeless sight, gray as the twilight, gray-white all over, without head without tail, now dancing on all fours, now on its hind legs, now on its fore legs, and either way waving great hoofs in the air. Whence came the howling that mocked and gibbered, no man could tell, whether from the dancing beast, whether from the hills.

The horsemen saw fiends on earth and in air, and turned and fled the haunted valley.

When he heard the panic, Bran scrambled down from his rock and brushed the dust out of his face and his clothes. "It is a good Bran," he said, and for his own satisfaction performed another little dance. "A good Bran, yea. The trick was featly done. But, oh my wits, my wits, what a poor soul hath a man! As often as I play me that trick, under the roof, under the sky, never it fails me. Conjure up a fiend for them and their souls cower and their joints are loosened. Yet what fiend could be more a fiend than man? I will believe in Mahound ere I believe that any world hath worse than this. But Bran is a fool."

SO HE went lustily for the castle and, making a straight line, passed those anxious horsemen, who kept to the track, and coming into the huddled little town of Malmesbury, he hit upon some of Odo's men who had been drinking there and, mingling with them, he entered the castle by the postern. Then he sought the hall and curled himself up on the rushes among the dogs and slept careless as they, yet, like them, not without dreams that made him start and moan.

In the morning, prowling, as his wont was, for news, he heard that in the night a party of horsemen had come to the main gate and asked lodging, swearing that they were the king's men. But the guard made them out a large party and, according to the custom of that troubled time, bade them draw off till morning. And when Sir Odo was told, "Splendor of God!" says he, "you did well, Walter. And if you had done other, you should hang. No man, not the king's self comes into hold of mine by night." Whereat a dog barked and Odo kicked him and the Fool laughed. "How now, rogue?"

"Why thus, cousin. The Fool treads on the hound's tail, the hound yelps and Lord Odo kicks the hound. And so the world goes on—and on—and on," and he flung himself on his hands and turned round and round like a wheel.

Odo kicked a stool into him, brought him down with a crash and laughed at him, laughed the louder as he huddled himself together and hugged his elbows and whined. "Up with you rogue, up." He lashed out with his riding-whip, and the Fool yelled, scrambled up and ran limping out. Whereupon Sir Odo mounted and hunted him round the courtyard, flogging him till he fell.

SO THE Fool did not go hawking with Sir Odo that day. He was in the kitchen, rubbing his bruises with fat and thinking after his fashion, thinking that, if only pain did not hurt him, he would be a very great man; thinking that whatever happens, there are always a thousand other things to happen; thinking that the finest song in the world is the Magnificat.

But when Sir Odo and his troop came back, he saw and shaded his eyes to see, tied to the stirrup of Hugues le Roux, the girl Judith. So he bustled up to help old Robert the falconer.

"What sport, brother?"

"Spavined sport, Fool."

"You have struck one gay heron at least."

"That piece?" he scowled at the girl. "Your right sister, Fool. Do you know how we took her? The churl which Odo pinned to the oak at the cross-roads yesterday, he is there yet and the spear in him and the tree. None of his folk were fools enough to dare loose him. But by my faith, when we came there this morning this witless wench is pulling at him and calling for help. And Odo must needs put her in the bag. St. Joseph, it was empty enough! But an unfledged woman! Sport! And young Hugues, the soft lad, must needs stick the churl's throat, he screamed so to die. Odo knocked a tooth out of him for that."

"You have been merry, brother," said the Fool, and turned away to the hall.

Odo sat there sprawling his bulk, and the girl, her hands tied behind her back, stood in front of him, straight and still. She was unkempt, her fair hair and her clothes covered with dust; but something in her puzzled him. "Who in the fiend's name?" he roared out. "You are no villain's brat. Who are you, wench?"

"Untie my hands, churl," she said, and her eyes met his, fierce and proud.

"Churl?" That was startled out of him.

"Churl and coward and naught. No knight uses a woman so."

"Woman? Say wildcat. All one. I know how to deal with women, be sure. Splendor of God! I can tame you, girl. Come, save your hide. Who are you?" She did not answer. "What knave set you on to meddle with my man?"

"Your man? You lie. You are a robber and a villian. A landless man."

Sir Odo started up and swore at length. "There is only one way with women all. Go think on it. Keep her hungry and thirsty, Walter. Put her in the chest. You will speak me fair before I have done with you, wench."

So she was dragged out, and into the chest she was thrust. Now the nature of the chest was this: a box, which would hardly hold the body of a man doubled up, was lined with iron wrought into points and rough edges and, the prisoner being put in, the lid was shut down upon him and bolted so that he was tortured by the pressure and bruised and pierced. The girl Judith, being smaller than a man, suffered less, yet enough. But when Odo and his band were at dinner, into the cell where the chest stood the Fool came limping, and he pulled back the bolt and threw up the lid.

She lifted her head, and through the tangle of hair he saw her face flushed dark and damp with sweat. She stared at him and her eyes were wild and empty of thought, then she groaned. He put a pewter cup to her lips, and she drained the broth. Then passionately, "Holy Christ, I hoped it was water," she cried. "Oh fool, fool!"

"Oh woman, woman. Woman every way."

She began painfully to get out of the chest.

"Nenny, nenny," said the Fool, and put his great hands on her and thrust her down again. "Thus, bad were worse. If they find you loose, you were better dead." Then the child bade him go, and cowered down and fell aweeping.

"Help the poor fool, lady," says he in a most piteous voice.

She looked up then. "Tell poor fool what brought lady into Malmesbury. Oh, Holy Cross, to come back into the jaws of the fiend!"

"The empress sent me to buy her a flask of wine."

THE Fool gaped. "Empress? God ha' mercy, lady! Bran knows no empress. Bran knows Goody Mold."

"She is the empress."

"The foul fiend fly away with her and burn her in hell," said Bran, and the girl stared at him, he spoke so like a natural man. "She will send a child to death lest her proud stomach should drink water."

"She is ill," the child said.

"Nenny, nenny, lady. Empresses and queens they can not be ill, they are great ones. It is poor you and poor I who are ill and very ill. Yea, faith, and so Goody Moll is Goody Empress! Now who had thought on that?" he giggled. "Why, but that is the end of the cord that is tangled. Here is Sir Odo hunting Madame Empress, and would give his soul to have her. And Sir Odo hath caught you and will torture your life away. Why, then, tell him where he may find Madame Empress and you go free."

"Oh base!" the child cried. "It is a treachery. You—you are a mean thing and naught."

"Yea, yea. Yet think, child. He means the worst that a man can. But you have a way of deliverance, and it is no virtue to give yourself to suffer sin. Save yourself, then, for blessed Mother Mary's sake."

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"Oh, the lady, the great lady, the tall lady with the gold lilies on her cloak," the fool giggled.

"It is you who are like the fiend!" the child cried.

"Not Bran, no. God help poor Bran, who means you well. Bran is but a fool. What is that gold about your neck, lady?"

She stared at him and put her hand to her bosom. "The empress gave it me. It is her own chain."

The Fool's big hand shot out. He tore it from her, pressed her down again into the chest, and shot the bolt and ran away.

But he found the castle in a commotion. A great company of horsemen were before the walls, and among them a banner which bore, gold upon red, a sagittarius, the banner of King Stephen. Sir Odo, heavy with wine, would not believe, though one and another bore him news, and when he heard the trumpets must needs climb the gate tower to see for himself, and the while a herald summoned the castle in the king's name, yet no man dared open without Odo's word. So the king was left to wait.

Down from the tower, his bloated face bowed and wrought in perplexities, came Sir Odo and, cursing, bade undo the gate. The first of the horsemen rode in and formed up on either side the courtyard while Odo's men scurried out of the way. The king's banner advanced and Odo came heavily forward to meet the king.

"Sir, I give you loyal welcome to this hold of mine."

"You, ay, I swore it was you," the king said. "What brought you here?"

"Please you enter my hall, sir."

"Your hall!" the king muttered, but swung down and strode on before.

The hall was littered and foul with the mess of dinner. Dogs were growling over the broken meat. "*Pardieu*, you keep high state for me," said the king, curling the nostril, and serving men scurried out. But the Fool, huddled on a stool by the cold hearth, stayed.

"I promise you good cheer, sir," Odo leered. "There is old wine in Malmesbury."

"Good cheer for swine in a sty. God's body, sirrah, why do I find you wallowing here?"

Odo stared at him and the Fool looked sideways. King Stephen had the body for a king, tall and strong and stately, he had the face of a king in a picture-book, handsome, benign, but weak.

"Sir, you do me a wrong. Do me reason," said Odo glowering at him. "Splendor of God, I am worth what I take."

"Who bade you take Malmesbury?"

Odo shrugged. "The place was fair game, sir. The Bishop of Salisbury had

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it in hold. Your friends must live upon your enemies."

"God have mercy, what are you to set Holy Church against me?"

"The Church?" Odo laughed. "By my faith, a king may laugh at the Church while such men as I ride with his banner."

The king swore and checked himself and shifted his feet, and the Fool looked at him and rocked to and fro. "You have done a great wrong," says the king. "Let it go. God's body, man, who sent you to Malmesbury? You were sent to watch the roads."

"I am not a boy to be schooled. I must ride my hunt my own way. I have won Malmesbury for you. That is my answer to all."

"Is it so?" the king flamed out again. "Are you fool, or are you rogue, sirrah?" And Odo flinched as the big man strode upon him. "While you waste time plundering here the empress slips by. And you, you keep no guard of the roads. You turn my men away when they come here for word of her."

"They came by night. I open no gate o' nights. For the rest, it is false, sir. Madame Empress has not come by this way."

"Oh, the lady, the great lady, the tall lady with the gold lilies on her cloak," the fool giggled.

They both turned on him. "Out, you dog!" Odo roared.

"What said he?" said the king.

The fool grinned at Odo and nodded and began to shuffle out, muttering to himself: "The lady, the tall lady with the gold lilies on her cloak and the black Barbary mare."

"By the rood, it is she!" the king cried. "Come hither, lad," and he turned upon Odo. "So, my lord! She has not come by this way!"

And Odo had not words in his surprise, and then they tumbled over each other. "The fellow is a fool, my lord, the veriest fool. He knows not what he says. There is no drain of wit in him. He means nothing. He knows not how to mean. He——"

"Be silent, you. Come. lad, when did you see the lady?"

The fool, watching Odo's furious brow, shrank away, putting up a hand to guard his head. "Na, na, Bran is a poor fool! Bran said naught. Bran has seen naught. Bran sees naught but what Lord Odo wants. Bran is a good fool."

"No man shall hurt thee, lad," the king said.

"YEA, yea. No one hurts Bran when Bran says naught." And he fell to talking gibberish.

Odo wiped his face. "Will you listen to a fool, my lord?" he said, and tried to laugh heartily.

"I have listened to a knave," said the king.

Odo bit his lips and then, seeing the Fool staring from one to the other with a vacant grin, struck at him and bade him out. The Fool shunned the blow, stumbled over the high chair where Odo sat and, picking himself up, put upon the table a great gold chain, as if he had knocked it down. He went out in a shambling run.

"Splendor of God!" quoth Odo, reaching for the chain. But the king was first. For the chain was wrought with the letters MATILDA IMPERATRIX. He held it aloft.

"You foul traitor!" he said and shouted. "Grimbald! Hugolin!"

But Odo did not understand, for he could not read. "I swear I never saw the thing before, my lord," he stammered.

And then the king laughed. "Ay, lie it out to the end. You never saw her chain, no more than you have seen her. Her chain wrought with her own name that she bought you with! God's body, man, do you think you can cheat me still? Take your lies to the fiend. Grimbald!" He flung round upon the men at arms who were running in. "Take the fellow and hang him."

"Sir Odo, my lord?"

"SIR Odo! Strike off his spurs and hang him like a churl."

Now by this time the Fool was slunk into the kitchen and to the scullions who spoke to him he answered, whining and howling, that there was great work afoot, great and very terrible and poor Bran was afraid. So they ran out to see, and he broke up a fowl and lay down and gnawed it and thought. Then he filled his pouch with food and stole out. In the courtyard Odo's men were huddled together apart and the king's men kept their ranks, and all were gazing up at the gate tower where could be seen a little company gathered close.

The Fool crept along from door to door and went to ground in the little chapel. The chief desire in his mind was to hide. So, cowering by the altar, "While the fool is the fool all men know him," says he. "King's men and Odo's men, all. If the fool is some other man, no man knows who he is. King's men think he is Odo's man. Odo's men think he is king's man. Ergo, dear fool, ergo—" and he fell to rummaging. In a curtained archway he found a chest, but it had been pillaged already, and priestly vestments strewed the ground. He grimaced at them, yet, turning them over, found among them an ample hooded cloak such as a priest might wear in walking. He put it on and preened himself.

"Now is Bran a learned clerk. Yea, yea. *Cucullus facit monachum.* The gown it makes a priest of me as motley made a fool of me, and many sorrier fools there be and many a naughtier priest I see; so God send I and myself go free." He stole to the door. In the red light of sunset Odo swung, a black bulk from the tower.

Bran shrunk back, crossed himself, went to the altar and said a prayer for Sir Odo his soul.

And while he prayed, he heard busy movements in the courtyard. The king's men were taking over the castle, sending out parties, unsaddling, seeking lodging and food. Bran stayed on his knees till all was quiet. Then in the twilight he stole out and sought the cell where the girl was prisoned. He opened the chest and she raised herself, staring through the dark. "Silent, silent, for the love of God, lady," he whispered, and lifted her out and laid her on the ground. She groaned and turned her face, stretching her cramped, bruised body. He pulled a flask of wine from his pouch and made her drink. "Have good heart. Odo is dead and all goes merrily. But the king is here and we must do stealthily." He left her and peered out. "Can you walk, child?" She struggled to her feet. "Wait a while, wait a while." He stole out and scouted on the way to the postern. There was no guard on the stair. He drew her after him.

They were out on the open hillside under the stars. She turned and looked in his face. "It is you! The Fool!" And she began to laugh weakly and caught at him and hung heavy on his arm.

He laid her down fainting. "Yea, yea. Bran is a fool," said he. And giggled and looked helplessly about him in the dark. And therewith an ass brayed. "Holy Cross! The monks are at vespers," quoth he, and suddenly ran on. Beyond a bank on the abbey's ground the monks' asses were at pasture. Bran came back holding two of them by the ears. He rubbed the girl's temples with wine and set her on one and, himself mounting the other, they rode away.

So through the moonlight they came again to that cave in the valley and found the boy quarreling with Madame Empress because she would not have him go look for his sister, but commanded him by his gentle blood to stay and guard his liege lady. And indeed Jocelin had come near forswearing both gentlehood and allegiance, when Judith and the Fool, having left their asses by the river, toiled up to the cave.

"Is it you, child? God's word, you have taken long enough of your errand," says the empress. "Have you brought us Christian food and drink at last?"

"Goody Mold, you have a proud stomach," the fool said. "Yea, and how be your poor bones, Goody Mold?"

The girl flung herself down. "I have naught, madame, and I have almost died for it," she said, and cried in her weariness. "He has it. He has everything, the Fool."

"She has said. Yea and verily and out of the mouths of babes and sucklings," said Bran in a voice like thunder. "He has all things, the Fool." And then it was the girl he fed first, and while she ate she stammered out her tale.

"GOD'S word," said the empress. "Stephen is in Malmesbury?"

"I do not know, madame. I was in that foul chest."

"Speak out, Fool. You have your story to tell."

"King Stephen is a goodly knight, he came to the castle in armor bright, he hanged Sir Odo against the light, he will march on Goody Mold with his might, pray. God you do not come in his sight. That is the tale I tell."

She was silent a while, then suddenly: "Where is my chain, sirrah? The chain you took from the child?"

"*Pardie*, Goody, that chain hanged cousin Odo. How, saith Goody? Marry thus! Because it lay by Odo's platter for the king to see," and he cackled laughter.

"Rogue, you have betrayed me!"

"God have mercy, Goody! Which is the fool here? Goody or I? Are you me or I you? Well, God mend all!" He flung himself down and snuggled into his cloak and began to snore.

In the morning the empress was feverish to be gone, and there was but one mind to it: whether King Stephen hunted them out or not, they could be no worse off by seeking a roof and food. She promised them safety if she could but come within the country that Bristol held or Gloucester.

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The girl flung herself down. "I have naught, Madame, and I have almost died for it," she said, and cried in her weariness. "He has everything, the Fool."

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But when she tried to walk she made a bad business of it, and the girl was little the lighter. Yet she gave trouble at being set upon an ass. "Nay, faith, Goody, ride or stay, all is one upon Judgment Day," said the Fool. "Yet an ass was good enough for Christ our Lord to ride."

So mount she did and they trudged off up the valley, and all the long morning met no man but some charcoal-burners, who sold them poached venison with a leer and a blessing. But a while after noon, drawing into a broader track, they sighted a banner. "Or and two bends gules and—what is it, child? A scallop sable? God's word, it is de Tracy's banner; they are Stephen's men! Now are we sped!" The empress laughed a little grimly and stopped the ass and stood.

The Fool swung himself up into a tree. "Yea, yea, they are horsemen, a company. They watch the road," he said, and slipped down to earth and grinned at the empress. "Will you trust poor Bran, mother?"

"You can do me no hurt, Fool, nor any good. Go your ways. I can meet what comes to me."

"Yea, yea. And these little ones?" She did not answer. She turned away. "I know and you know," Bran said.

"We stand by our lady, Fool," the boy said.

"Why, so do I, lord. Thus: Let you lie across the ass, mother, like to one dead, and I will be the priest that takes you to burial. Yea, yea, I can talk it, and more Latin than a mitered abbot. So go we through their lines to Gloucester."

"Madame, it is not fit," the girl cried.

The woman's eyes dwelt on her. "And these be your children, mother," the Fool said.

"I will do it," the empress said. Then she lay upon the ass and they bound her with the cord of the Fool's cloak so that she hung safe, and the Fool covered her own cloak with dust, and they went on.

Then when the horsemen challenged them, "*Pax vobiscum*," Bran drawled through his nose.

"Who are ye?"

"My son, I am the priest of St. Samson's cell by Avon, and this a poor woman which burned charcoal in the woods. But she is dead of a putrid fever—" the horsemen reined back in a hurry—"being stricken down in foul torments, and in one hour living and dead and full of corruption. So that, rest her soul, she died unshriven. These be her children, and we take her to bury her in holy ground."

"Go your ways in God's name." The horsemen drew off to windward.

"*Benedicite*," said Bran, and strode on, and for a good mile, still in gait and manner, acted the priest.

Then the girl plucked his arm. "Let her up now, for God's sake."

"What, what, what? Is Goody not dead, after all? By my faith, I thought she was dead in sooth and I true priest. Nenny, nenny. Bran is a fool now and forever." So he unlashed the empress and set her on her feet and she, holding her flushed head, swore like a man. "Nay, Goody, was it not featly done?"

"Do me no more such feats," said she.

"Now I know you are royal," said he.

So they went on again, working through the high hills to the safety beyond, seeing no man but lonely shepherds afar, till in the late afternoon a shout rang through the stillness, and out of the bosom of the hills horsemen swept down on them. "Here is not even time to die, Goody," said Bran.

But she cried out: "No time nor need. See, it is the lions and the bar sinister. It is my brother's banner. These are mine own people. They are Robert's men." And she fell to dusting her cloak and patting at her coif and, slipping from the ass, strode on before and she called out: "Who is your captain?"

There was parley and a knight galloped forward who, as soon as he made her out, saluted her and, coming up, dismounted and fell on his knee with a "God be praised, lady!"

"You are well met." She gave him her hand. "You will be my escort to Bristol, sir."

He kissed her hand again. "You are alone, lady?"

"Have these two children in care," she said. He lifted her to his saddle and, calling to his men-at-arms, gave the boy and the girl. The company clattered off down the hill.

The Fool sat himself down on the turf and kissed his hand to their backs. And he laughed and talked to himself in Latin thus: "Now there was found in it a poor wise man and he, by his wisdom, delivered the city. Yet no man remembered that same poor man." He started and turned. The two asses were nuzzling against his shoulders.

The second story in ***"The Fool"*** *series, "Tale of a King's Heir," will appear in EVERYBODY'S for June.*

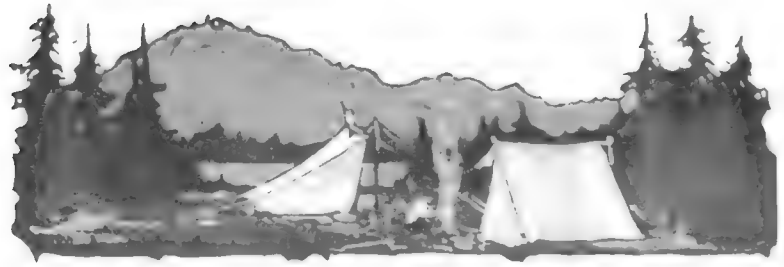
Little Roads

By Margaret Widdemer

I AM homesick for the little roads to beauty,
The little roads that any one may gain,
Dance-music beating in the lamplight,
Organ-music grinding in the rain;

My eyes are very tired that were uplifted,
Seeking precious things that only wise men know—
I was born of simple folk and dreamers,
And back again to simple folk I go:

Foolish hearts that cry for love and laughter,
Foolish hands that reach for joy or pain—
Dance-music beating in the lamplight,
Organ-music grinding in the rain!



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Val Moatley's pale eyes rested on the Chigger who, slumped in a chair, looked far from dangerous.

The Chigger

A Story of a Yegg's Perfect Job

By Maxwell Smith

THE politician enlisted a district leader to steer the party right. Val Moatley's father was a good contributor to campaign funds, and Val Moatley wanted to go "slumming." The district leader called in a ward captain who knew the byways for "slummers" and the paths beyond. Because the politician graced the affair, it carried on a few steps into the beyond.

The stock props which are open to the vulgar gaze of the ordinary respectable citizen who gets a thrill out of dipping into what he supposes are the softly trodden places in the criminal world were only skimmed on this excursion. In one of the deeper recesses, Val Moatley came into contact with the folks who could serve his purpose.

Following the series of introductions downward, the ward captain introduced the keeper of a saloon on which prohibition had made just *some* impression. It was more of a hangout than a saloon, really, with a gambling-room specializing in craps on the side. The keeper attached himself personally to the party when the identity of its members was whispered.

Val Moatley's genuine interest began when, in a room back of the "back" room, he saw the red-headed morsel known as the Chigger.

The ward captain leaned confidentially. "That bloke can do *any*thing with a safe," he murmured. "The manufacturers ought to pay him to lay off!"

THEY called him the Chigger because somebody among his kind—the kind with whom he consorted but did not work—had seen a resemblance between him and the burrowing mite for which he became a namesake. Not five feet tall, weighing little more than a hundred pounds, the Chigger bored successfully into the hide of society, and wherever he penetrated he sure did leave a sore spot, big according to the amount in the safe he went up against. He could crack the best box ever built—do a dainty job with a can-opener, whether he ripped the lock or carved out a wall, being dependent only upon the measure of the safe; or burn a way in along the most approved modern lines which, alas! have the drawback of necessitating the toting of bulky and heavy gas-tanks; or just naturally blast the door out in good old-fashioned peterman style.

Val Moatley's pale eyes rested on the Chigger who, slumped in a chair, looked far from dangerous. The Chigger, broke, had a date which he expected to yield certain information that would result at least in some safemaker getting a regular repair job.

"But if he's a known burglar," in his innocence Val Moatley used the slighting characterization, "why don't they lock him up?"

He glanced suspiciously to see whether his informant was stringing him. He hoped not—for he required a man like the Chigger.

A shrug answered him; a shrug and—"It's all right to know what a bloke does, but something else again to put it on him." The ward captain ordered another drink. "Now, over there," he resumed the recital of the claims to fame attaching to others present, "there are the brains, those two, of the best gang of wagon-boosters in town—they can lift a truck out from under the driver while it's going up Broadway, and get away with it! And there——"

Val Moatley was no longer listening. The Chigger satisfied him.

The politician and the district leader were frankly bored. Moatley apparently

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fell in with their mood. He yawned.

"I thought there'd be a—a something—you know—about a bunch of crooks," he deprecated, shaking his head in evident disappointment. He stretched lazily. "How about going?"

"Sure!" said the politician.

"Wanta see more?" queried the district leader.

"There's a place three blocks over," said the ward captain.

"No, I'm going up-town," said Val Moatley.

The others went their ways, but the politician accompanied him as far as Times Square. There, since Moatley had hinted an engagement, they parted. It was turning ten o'clock.

Twenty minutes later Val Moatley halted his car again, a few doors from where he had seen the Chigger. His hat well down, his back turned to the nearest street light, he accosted a nattily dressed bouyant youth who was passing.

"Say——"

The youth paused and his eye flickered. Moatley waved him to the car.

"Know the folks in there?" asked Moatley, indicating the saloon.

"I've been in once or twice," replied the youth guardedly.

"Know the Chigger?"

The other pursed his lips scornfully. "Na-a!" he said. "I don't know nobody!"

Val Moatley laughed. "All right," he agreed, "but—if you want to drop in and tell the Chigger I'd like to talk with him, I'll be obliged. Just mention it to him, will you?"

He had no idea how this man who could do anything with a safe would look upon his invitation. He could not, however, go in and talk with the Chigger where others would witness the meeting.

The youth covertly scrutinized Moatley's expensive car. He snapped his cigaret butt against a wheel.

"That all you want? he asked sarcastically. "So long!"

He swaggered on; but Moatley's sinking hope revived as the unobliging one, who knew nobody, turned into the saloon.

In a couple of minutes the Chigger hesitated in the doorway. He did not at the moment fear the police. He did expect a message; and a message sometimes arrived in strange ways. He sauntered toward the automobile.

Suddenly become breathless, Val Moatley hailed him quietly.

"Say——"

THE Chigger looked him over calmly. He had barely noticed Moatley a while ago, and the darkness now in any case prevented recognition. His skinny face was blank, except for the ferret eyes. He left the talking to Moatley, who leaned close.

"Will you help me get into a safe?" blurted Val Moatley huskily.

The Chigger grinned.

"Sub-Treasury or Morgan & Company?" he ridiculed.

"No—no." Val Moatley glanced nervously around. With his cracksman here in front of him he was fidgety when he should be level-headed and convincing.

"Nothing like that," he added jerkily. "It—it's my own safe—in my own home. I—I—" He threw open the car door. "Ride round the block with me and I'll tell you."

The Chigger pondered. Maybe they were trying to frame him. He looked about the street; into the body of Moatley's machine. They might be jobbing him, though he had certain assurances.

But the Chigger was a gambler; and he was broke. He did not know that the information he awaited certainly would come that night. It might be days before he received it. Meanwhile— He stepped into the car. With a sigh that mingled relief and trepidation Moatley started it.

As they swung slowly around the corner, the Chigger had opportunity to study his companion in the light of an arc-lamp. His thin lips drew straighter, his gaze more appraising, as he noted the haggard, alien lines about Moatley's mouth, which was set, perchance to hide a tremble. He saw also that Moatley's eyes were restless, that his hands shook on the steering-wheel.

Val Moatley's mouth was the weak feature of an otherwise well-formed face. The upper lip was long and continually pulled in over the lower, with an occasional twitching that seemed to jibe with an evasive quality in his pale eyes. He had a trick, too, of wetting his lips, just the tip of his tongue showing between them.

SHREWDLY the Chigger marked these things. He smiled the shadow of a smile. He wasn't going to believe Moatley entirely, of course, but there might be something worth while in the proposition. He could listen to it anyway.

"What's the dope?" he demanded.

Moatley's fingers gripped the wheel harder. He did not look at the Chigger. His voice was huskier.

"It's a safe in my home," he said again. "There's a paper in it—a contract—that I must have first thing in the morning, and—" he caught his breath and licked his lips—"and the combination has jammed. I can't open the safe."

Wheeling into Canal Street he got his mind back to the task of driving in time to escape with no more damage than scraped paint against a truck.

"The maker'll open it," said the Chigger shortly.

"It was made in Chicago," explained Moatley. "They can't get a man here in time."

The Chigger grinned on the far side of his face at the slender fiction. "Yeh?" he remarked sympathetically. It wasn't his cue to talk. His was to listen just now.

Val Moatley completed his proposal. "There's nearly a thousand dollars cash in the safe. You can have that if you open it."

A thousand dollars! Not much of a stake but—it was a stake!

"How big a box?" inquired the Chigger mildly.

"Small—" Moatley repressed his eagerness over this show of interest. "Just an ordinary small safe. You—you'll do it?"

The Chigger didn't answer immediately. He wanted to figure it out. Moatley was lying—that was understood. Why should he want to tap his own safe?

"How do I know it's your home?" asked the Chigger abruptly.

"You can watch me go in," Moatley tried to smile. "They won't let me in if I'm a stranger, will they?"

"An' I step right along wit' yuh?" The Chigger's expressed skepticism was justified.

Val Moatley frowned and balked. "N-no. You—ah—I'll let you in."

Moatley looked at his watch. Twenty minutes to eleven. "It's getting late," he urged. "If you won't do it—I'll have to get somebody else. They told me that you could——"

"Who told yuh?" The little yegg pivoted to him.

"I forget." Moatley thought that a demonstrated ability to forget might be helpful; it appeared to be a rule in these circles. Besides, he did not wish to mention names which later on might tie him up circumstantially.

The Chigger let it pass. He decided to gamble on the proposition. While he broke that safe he'd see that his employer stood by. Should anything go wrong and a jam occur, he'd guarantee that Moatley was in it too. But it seemed like a sure thing. Moatley must know positively that everything was clear or he wouldn't take the chance.

"Thousand cash?" he queried casually.

"Ca-ca-cash!" gulped Val Moatley. Dizzily he heard directions given him and followed them.

"Shoot up and over Hester," said the Chigger. "I wanta get somethin'—" he grinned again skeletonically, slyly—"somethin' that you'll have to carry."

Val Moatley's teeth chattered in sudden funk. "Ca-can't you look after the ni-nitrogly—" he was stammering when the Chigger interrupted.

"Nitro hell!" he scoffed. "Y' said this was on'y a tin box! I'm gonna let y' carry the can-opener!"

They stopped at a tenement and he disappeared to return with a gun-case. Val Moatley took it and was thankful for its innocent aspect. He hadn't the slightest conception of what a can-opener was like, and consequently had been fearful that the object to be burdened upon him might be of telltale nature. The gun-case suggested nothing out of the way.

"I'LL drop you up the street," he completed announcement of their program now that the cracksman was committed to the job, "where you can get a cab. I'll drive alone—you follow." He had sense enough to realize that his fable concerning the reason for breaking the safe had not sunk very deep. He glanced up as he gave the address on Madison Avenue, but the Chigger was expressionless.

The Chigger contented himself with a grunt. He didn't yet quite get the hang of the situation.

Val Moatley looked back at the taxi in which the Chigger trailed him. He tingled all over, but now his nerve was steadier. He hadn't expected to make such rapid progress in locating a safe-cracker. In another hour he'd be all set to do as his father bruskly had told him—to stand on his own feet.

There were just grounds, he felt, for being sore at his father. Not sore enough to strangle him or beat him on the head, maybe, but sufficiently sore to make him do what he vowed he would not do. It wouldn't hurt the old man to give up the six thousand dollars that Val simply had to get by to-morrow! If for no other reason, he might have done it for Alicia's sake. Alicia was Val's bride of a year. It wasn't fair to expose her to a money pinch simply

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because another of Val's little stock fliers had gone wrong.

Val hadn't thought of that latter slant before, but now he proceeded to kid himself that he was carrying out this scheme solely through a desire to protect Alicia.

As a matter of fact, Alicia wasn't in any danger of suffering. Her own people or Moatley, Senior would see to that. But that foundational weakness which showed in Val's long upper lip and in his eyes at times, now seized upon her as a convenient excuse for the act he was engineering. It helped his courage, this (in a way) virtuous reflection.

As the Chigger had surmised, Val was quite certain he would have clear sailing. He and Alicia were to stop at his father's house that night because it would be too late for them to return to their own place in a suburb on the Hudson. Alicia and his father were at an affair, from which he had excused himself to go gather a competent yegg. Alicia was a fiend on dancing, so they wouldn't be home until one o'clock at the very earliest.

Bringing up at the door, he hopped almost merrily from the machine. He spotted the Chigger's cab stopping a block distant, and he chuckled. This would be a rare joke on the old man! Served him right. Why'd he have to be so everlastingly peeved at a chap? Why couldn't he give a fella a decent-sized roll in one piece, so he'd have some real groundwork to raise a fortune on, instead of doling it out, and then when a chap got nipped refusing to help him?

A RARE joke, although naturally he'd never be able to let the old man in on it. And it would cost more than the paltry six thousand that had been asked. Much more! A burglar, though he *were* one of the family, couldn't count out what he needed and leave the rest! That wouldn't be regular—not in burglary!

Swinging the heavy gun-case with assumed jauntiness he went up the house steps, recounting what he had seen his father leave in the safe that afternoon. Yes, he had been lucky in finding a cracksman so handily. There was eight thousand in cash, eleven thousand in Liberty bonds that his dad had brought home for some reason or other; some other securities, a few negotiable, about which he wouldn't bother, and several pieces of jewelry about which he'd make up his mind when they were in his hands.

The Liberty bonds were virtually cash. That meant nineteen thousand dollars anyway. A thousand for the Chigger—eighteen thousand for Val! And there was lots of time, a full hour and a half, before the old man and Alicia would return. Watching Val Moatley enter the house, the Chigger wrinkled his skinny face. Still he didn't catch the drift.

The Chigger switched a pistol into his coat pocket and held it there. He was gambling on this deal, but if the cards were stacked it was as well to have an ace in the hole.

Val Moatley smiled on the man who let him in.

"Phone the garage to send after my car," he said. "Then you can go to bed, John, if you like. I'll wait up till the folks get home. Everybody else in bed?"

"Yes, sir; all but the butler—he's out, sir." He stood holding Val's hat, his other hand extended for the gun-case. "Shall I take that, sir?"

"No." Involuntarily Val Moatley drew the case farther out of reach. "No. It's a—a gun I want to look over. I'll take it along, thanks." He couldn't let the precious can-opener out of his grasp.

"Yes, sir." The man turned away. "I'll phone the garage."

"Then you can go to bed, John," repeated the amateur in crime. He had to clear the way for the entrance of the Chigger.

Going into the dining-room he selected a bottle from the sideboard cellar and poured himself a handsome drink. He heard the servant telephone the garage and go up-stairs.

During the five minutes he waited he opened the gun-case. Curiously he examined its contents—a half-inch steel rod, about thirty inches long, with a hinged clamp at one end and another clamp that could be slid to any distance along the rod, and a small finely contrived lifting-jack. Without having perceived the exact means of application, he stowed it away and carried the gun-case up-stairs. Back in the dining-room he poured himself another drink, which on second thought he left untasted, then tiptoed into the dimly lighted hall.

Had Val Moatley looked back, he must have seen the Chigger slinking behind him.

Quietly opening the front door, he stood there, raising his hand in signal. The Chigger came briskly out of the darkness and boldly mounted the steps. With a warning motion for silence, Val Moatley closed the door. He no longer attempted to make the diminutive yegg believe that this was a legitimate enterprise. He didn't

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care what the Chigger thought. At the point of consummation he found himself trembling with a stifling anxiety to get it over.

Taking the Chigger by the arm he shoved him quickly across the hall and into the dining-room. He gulped the drink already in the glass and offered the bottle to the other. "Don't drink when I work," said the Chigger shortly. "Where's the box?"

Val Moatley flushed, partly with excitement, partly from the burn of the liquor. His tongue flicked over his lips; his long upper lip twitched. He shut off the lights. "Wait here till I see that everything's quiet," he whispered. "I'll be back—in a minute."

The Chigger didn't relish being left alone on strange premises. Usually he had the complete layout of anywhere he entered. Should any one come in while Moatley was absent, he would be at a dangerous disadvantage—he wouldn't know which way to turn. Before he could protest, however, Val Moatley glided away.

Light as a feather on his feet, the Chigger followed.

Swiftly but silently Val Moatley climbed to the second floor. The thick, padded runner deadened his steps on the stairs and in the hall above as he went on to his father's study at the rear of the house.

Had he looked back, he must have seen the Chigger slinking behind him. But Val Moatley could only look forward—forward to the room in which were nineteen thousand dollars and more ready to his hand!

At the head of the stairs, the Chigger crouched, thoughtful and puzzled, as Moatley went into the study and closed the door. What was this bird up to? Was he trying to put something over—over on the Chigger? If not, why did he shut himself up in a room when he should be leading the way to the safe he wanted opened?

The little cracksman's eyes grew cold, bright, hard. His hand stiffened on the automatic in his pocket. He stole along the hall to kneel at the keyhole. Moatley did not come within his range of vision.

An ear pressed to the door; he listened. The click-click-click of the tumblers in a combination lock came to him. He grinned twistedly and stood erect. This guy who had hired him *was* putting something over!

The Chigger took the gun from his pocket. His fingers gently, so very gently, turned the handle of the door.

QUAKING at the knees and breathing fast, Val Moatley pulled the safe door wide. He'd take the cash—all but a thousand dollars—and the Liberty bonds. He'd lock the safe again and call the Chigger to operate on it.

If he merely robbed the safe by using his knowledge of the combination, suspicion might easily incline to him. His father wouldn't prosecute, of course, but—it would cause a complete severance of their already overtaxed relations.

The brand of the cracksman on the strong box—he would have the Chigger make as much of a mess of it as possible—would remove him from suspicion. Some scratches he would make on the sash of a window on the ground floor would show how the yegg had entered.

The thousand dollars remaining in the safe would be the Chigger's pay. Val would put the balance out of sight. He didn't propose to run the risk of his cracksman demanding a bigger divvy!

The son who had turned thief in his father's house was reaching into the safe when the door behind him creaked. The flush of success faded from him. With a start of fright he faced about. The Chigger regarded him meanly, with pistol pointing.

"What's the thought?" he asked sibilantly. His voice and eyes were as chilling as the automatic he joggled so menacingly.

Val Moatley cowered, moistening lips which wouldn't stay moist. He raised an arm as though it would shield him from bullets. Heroic stuff did not outcrop in his make-up. "Put that away," he gasped. "You can—have it all."

The Chigger sneered. He hated a yellow man. Moatley's last words he took as confirmation that he was being double-crossed. He thought he saw the scheme.

"GONNA clean up an' let the little Chigger get pinched on the job, were yuh?" he rasped. "Gonna put me to work on an empty box an' spring a cop on me, huh?"

Grinning viciously he advanced. Moatley backed against the wall and stood shivering. "No, no! I wasn't going to do that." His pale eyes like his tone were pleading. "I was going to—to leave your thousand in there and have you—have you——"

"Whose *dump* is this?" interrupted the Chigger, waving to indicate the house.

"My father's. He——"

The little yegg laughed. "Robbin' the old man with this boy to lay on the cammerflage! That's a hot one! Aw, stand still. I ain't gonna hurt yuh! Let's see how much I got on the showdown! You can have the thous——"

His voice died at the sound of a door shutting. He looked to Moatley for explanation.

"My father!" A great fear possessed Val Moatley. If his father found him beside the open safe he was through—done for good. He had a momentary idea of shouting an alarm and claiming that the Chigger had broken into the house and forced him to open the safe. The tense picture of the slight figure, shoulders thrown slightly forward, gun-arm hugging close to the ribs with an implacable solidity that englanced the wickedness of the weapon, deterred him. He could feel the copper-jacketed bullets thud-thudding into his body—hear his shout become a strangling gurgle as the roar of the gun ceased. Val Moatley's imagination worked overtime!

Reading his thoughts, the Chigger's eyes mocked him.

"Yell, y' double-crossin' scout! Why don't yuh yell?"

Taunting him, the Chigger backed to the door and opened it a crack. From below there was a man's voice and a woman's laughter.

The Chigger locked the door and pocketed the key. "Who's the dame?"

Val Moatley choked on the words—"My wife." It recurred to him that he had attributed his thievery to the necessity of providing for Alicia! He made a sympathy play. "It was for her that I was doing—this," he whispered. "G-get out of here—go before they come up. I'll lock the safe and—and," he finished weakly, "it'll be all right."

The Chigger shook with satiric mirth.

"Let *me* go," begged Moatley. "I'll keep dad from coming in here—and you can escape when the house quiets down."

The brilliant suggestion was squelched.

"Norn yer life!" grated the Chigger derisively. "Y' poor sap, y'll stick till we land right or in the Tombs. Y'll stick," he stabbed the gun forward, and Moatley jumped with a suppressed cry of fright, "if I havta bump yuh!"

His sparkling eye fell on the transom. He swore. The light showing there would attract the man and woman coming upstairs. Yet if he darkened the room Moatley might somehow get the jump on him.

It was time to get out.

The Chigger ran to the safe. He stuffed the cash and the Liberty bonds into his pockets, grinning the while at his companion in crime.

"That makes us even!" he chortled. "An I'll tell yuh somethin'—I got witnesses 'at y' brung me here—the guy y' sent into Mike's after me an' a couple 'at spotted yuh waitin' while I got the tools. So don't squeal, kid, don't do anything like that!" He sidled to the window.

"Hell's fire!" he breathed. Like the rear windows on the first two floors of many of these old houses that stand wedged together in New York, this window was protected by iron bars.

The Chigger was caught in the jam of his life, and he knew it. He could fight his way out, but that probably would call for shooting which he disliked; he never had fired except when fired upon and had to reply. It was a bet that that fool woman would scream as soon as she saw the gun if he tried to herd her and the old man into the room here, to lock them in with his late accomplice and present prisoner. Suppose he did reach the street, their shouts would start the hunt so fast he wouldn't have a chance. The neighborhood was well covered by private patrol services as well as by the police. And it was a ten-to-one shot that now his luck had broken wrong, it'd go worse and make him gallop into the arms of a cop on the first corner.

THESE thoughts made him glower vengefully at Val Moatley. If that stiff had come clean, split something, like a white man, instead of attempting to hog the bag, the job would have been done and they'd have been clear.

The Chigger smiled wryly. He was in a hole.

The woman's laughter rang again—nearer. The man's joined in. They were in the upper hall.

"Hello!" they heard Moatley, Senior, say. "Val's home, I guess."

Then Alicia: "Val! Oh, Val!"

The Chigger motioned for silence. He moved to Val Moatley's side. The happy, untroubled tone of Alicia stirred something within him—and raised a question.

"Y' say y're pullin' this for her," he hissed. "Does she know?"

Before the icy, boring, accusing gaze, Val Moatley quailed anew. But the remnant of coherency left in his panic-stricken mind snatched at the straw—"Ye-es. She——"

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Her hand in his relaxed, then closed into a fist. Her face became white and the light crept from her eyes.

"Oh, Val!"

"——she proposed——"

The heel of the Chigger's hand clicked Moatley's teeth together, not tenderly.

"Y're a liar!" he stated pithily. "Shut up!"

The handle of the door rattled.

"Val!" Moatley, Senior, was puzzled. He could not understand the door being locked. Val had been worried over the refusal of money. The father's heart magnified the significance of the locked door. "Val—" there was a tremor of anxiety in his speech. "Open the door, Val." He rapped shakily.

In the hush Val Moatley and the Chigger heard Alicia's frightened inhalation as she, too, realized that something was amiss. They could tell that it was her soft hands that beat now on the panels as she cried again——

"Val! Are you there, Val? Open——"

The Chigger frowned as he contemplated the pathetic form of Moatley. Val's shoulders drooped, his head sagged as though the muscles of his neck had given out and could no longer support it; his arms hung limp, the palms of his hands outturned in mute appeal. Almost there were tears in his eyes, agonized in their pleading, and the wriggling nerves in his long lip reminded the Chigger of a scared, helpless rabbit he once had seen fascinated by a dog in a fancier's shop.

"Y'love yer wife?" he queried irrelevantly in a fierce whisper.

Val Moatley's throat gulped but he couldn't speak. He nodded.

"GEE!" The Chigger puffed. "Ain't it funny!" From her tones it was apparent that she loved Val. "The poor kid!" he muttered with a glance of pitying contempt at her husband. "The poor kid!"

The thumping at the door was renewed, with the calls to Val to let them in. The plaintive, half-sobbing, wholly alarmed cries of the wife reached the best that was in the Chigger. He felt that it was bad enough at the best for her to be tied to Val Moatley, and that it must cause her burning heartache if she should learn that her husband was a common thief.

"What we gonna do about this?" He put the problem to himself, and because of his queer composition he probably knew the answer in advance. He bent close to Val Moatley's ear. It was a gamble, that was all; and he'd take his chance.

"Talk to 'em," he whispered. "Get yer nerve! Stall—tell 'em y'been sleepin'. Ask what they've got y' locked in for! Kid 'em! Say anythin' for a stall!"

While he spoke he was undoing the gun-case. He withdrew the can-opener as Val Moatley jiggled the door-knob and gave a poor imitation of the new part in which he had been cast.

"I'm all right," he chattered. "What's the matter? Why is the—the door locked?"

The gratefulness in Alicia's exclamation repaid the Chigger. With a smile he locked the safe, clamped the end of the can-opener to the door. The steel rod swung over the combination. Sliding the other clamp into position, he screwed it fast to the combination knob. The jack he placed with its base against the safe,

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its thrusting surface against the rod.

Peremptorily he gestured to Val Moatley to attend to the business of stalling. Val had ceased stalling to stare with widening, questioning eyes at his companion.

"Are you *sure* there's nothing wrong, Val?" Alicia's voice again was anxious.

"N-n-nothing!" he replied, watching the Chigger laying his weight on the elevating lever of the jack.

"Queer about the key," said Moatley, Senior, irritable now in his thankfulness that his boy had not—well, taken the refusal of financial help too much to heart. "I'll wake the housekeeper and get——"

"No, no—no!" Val's tone rose excitedly. His gaze dilated on the Chigger, who was bearing down on the jack with all his strength. The tempered steel rod was edging away, away, from the safe door under the pressure, and taking the combination knob with it.

"Damn it!" The elder Moatley exploded. The vociferous protest from his son convinced him that something *was* wrong. "What's going on in there, Val?" he insisted sharply. "I'll get a key—or an ax—if you don't let me in quickly."

Val Moatley saw that all he had to do was to detain his father another minute.

"Wait—wait—don't do that, because—I'll explain," he cried disconnectedly, and ran to aid the Chigger.

While Moatley, Senior, clamored and Alicia's fear returned, there was a ripping of metal and the combination knob tore loose in the claw of the can-opener.

An instant and the Chigger had manipulated the interior mechanism. The safe stood open, and this time it was scarred as Val Moatley had planned it would be.

"I kept y' under the gun so y' couldn't butt in," the Chigger informed the man he was saving. "See? That'll save yer face. Now," he produced the key to the door, "now I'm goin'. So long!"

For no reason except that it vented some of his disgust, he shoved Val Moatley and sent him tumbling over a chair into a corner. Like lightning he unlocked the door and threw it wide. Gun in hand he posed on the threshold, covering Moatley, Senior, and Alicia.

"Out the way, folks—get!" he ordered. "Get t' hell——"

ALICIA started, gave a cry, but held her ground, ignoring the pistol as she saw her husband getting to his feet. She would have pushed her way in to him had not her father-in-law moved faster. Unlike her, he was heedful of the threatening gun but it did not halt him. He leaped at the Chigger—leaped as well as a fifty-year-old man who weighs a hundred and ninety-eight, but is in good condition, can leap.

The Chigger had no intention of shooting. At present his gun was for intimidation purposes only. When it failed to intimidate, he dodged low and dived almost on his belly along the floor. He calculated on his small size squeezing by. Instead, he found himself pinned under the bulk of T. M. Moatley, who, by a quick shift of his attack, simply fell on the fugitive.

It was then that Alicia, seeing Val was unhurt, screamed; as the Chigger had been positive she would under slight provocation.

Clinging to one another she and her precious Val watched the struggle in the hall. The Chigger was striving vainly to hoist the bulk that pressed him face down.

"Lemme go or I'll shoot yuh!" he grunted. The gun still was in his hand, but he knew that this was a futile thrust, for his assailant had a weighty hand detailed to hold it tight to the floor.

"Shoot," said T. M. Moatley grimly, "and be damned!"

Talk of shooting awoke Alicia to action. It dawned on her that she and her husband might lend assistance.

"Help your father, Val," she sacrificed bravely, although it was terror even to think of Val being injured. She propelled him gently toward the heaving pair.

Val Moatley also awoke to the fact that it would be awkward for him if the Chigger were captured. There were those witnesses to their meeting that the cracksman had mentioned.

Gingerly he wrested the gun away and dropped it into his pocket. He seized the Chigger by the arms.

"I've got him, dad," he panted. "You can get up."

"THANKS, son." His father rose to his knees but still held the captive's other arm. "Whew!" he whistled. "That's enough exertion for an old man." He peered at the Chigger who lay quietly, his neck twisting to glare balefully at Val. "What was he after—the safe?"

"Yes—" Val Moatley broke off with an ejaculation as of pain. Deliberately he let go the Chigger's arm and fell over against his father.

Not slow to recognize the chance that was handed him, the Chigger snaked his body round. Moatley, Senior, his balance already disturbed by the collision of his son, fell away from him. With another twist the fugitive got his full freedom and broke for the stairs.

Val Moatley did not interfere. He was doubled up, hands on his abdomen, moaning that he had been kicked, and praying that the Chigger would make it!

But luck was out for the Chigger. Alicia's scream had knocked away the last support. As he bolted for the stairs, the butler who had just come in and the footman Val had sent to bed intercepted him. This time he was snared right, with no promise of rescue!

Val Moatley groaned at the inopportune arrival of the servants. He made rapid recovery from his alleged injury. He was done—through. His hand went out, groping, to his wife—groping because there was a mistiness before his eyes. This was about the last time she would look at him like that. In a few minutes she would know and—despise him as a thief.

He winced as his father asked solicitously. "You all right, Val?"

He couldn't look at the speaker as he answered. "Yes. You're not hurt, dad?" He lingered over that final word; he wouldn't be allowed to call this man dad much oftener.

"Sure!" T. M. Moatley chuckled. It was ages since he had been in a rough-and-tumble and he'd rather enjoyed it. He called to the servants who had their prisoner nearly under control. "Fetch him in here."

As they dragged the Chigger back to the study, Moatley turned again to his son. "Now, Val, tell us about it. Darned good thing," he beamed, "that you didn't go with us. If you hadn't been here to hold him up he'd have cleaned the place out!"

Held between his captors, the Chigger grinned good-naturedly. He was licked, but somebody had to lose on a gamble. He wondered why his luck had deserted him.

"Yuh said it," he interjected. "If birdie hadn't a-been here— An' say," he nodded approvingly at the father, "y'got guts, old son, the way y' walked int'at cannon! Do a feller a good turn, will yuh, an' testify 'at I didn't try to use it! Do that little thing, will yuh—and the lady, too?."

While his hearers gaped, and from what they saw on his lean face did him the justice of crediting him with more than mere bravado, the Chigger's glance roved to Alicia. It was his first real look at her, and he smiled as he bewildered her by again remarking:

"Yuh poor kid!"

Then he saw how she clung to Val Moatley, saw the radiance that largely displaced the bewilderment as she looked at her husband.

The Chigger's eyes struck fire like steel on flint at Val. His smile was swallowed up in a sneer, accented as he audibly exhaled through his nostrils. In his estimation, Val Moatley was a poor specimen for any woman to be bound to!

Moatley, Senior, snorted over the wrecked safe and poked into it to learn what was missing.

The butler broke the tension by asking whether he should call the police.

"Yes—no, wait a minute." T. M. Moatley remembered the gun. "You got the pistol, didn't you, Val? We can use it to keep our bantam friend quiet. Has he got the money and bonds?"

"Yeh," said the Chigger. "I got 'em. Y' can have 'em if them guys let loose o' me."

"THE pistol, Val—the pistol!" repeated Moatley. He wouldn't trust the tiny yegg too far.

Val Moatley shook himself. His mouth contracted, the long lip hiding the lower under a straight line. His grip tightened on his wife's hand. He squared his shoulders and controlled his knees. The Chigger was taking it like a man. Couldn't he try to do the same?

"He won't attempt to escape," he heard himself saying. "I'll give my word on that." He hesitated, avoiding the Chigger's quick, sharp, curious gaze. "Send these men away, dad," he went on, "while we talk with him. Maybe he had a reason—a good reason—for coming here. Maybe——"

His father and his wife regarded him as though he had gone insane. The Chigger eyed him with an odd interest, much as he might have contemplated some strange bug; and the hardness faded from the cracksman's eyes while his smile returned.

"Don't be an idiot, Val," said his father peevishly. "Where's the pistol——"

Val Moatley shrugged impatiently. "If it will make you more comfortable, here it is—but it isn't necessary." He covered the Chigger. "Now send the servants away and," his voice was almost commanding, his expression defiant, "don't send for the police—yet."

T. M. Moatley reached over his shoulder inside his coat and scratched his back. He was perplexed, annoyed. "What the devil— Go on, go on!" he barked at the

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servants. "But don't get too far away."

"Nor stay too near," supplemented Val. "The head of the stairs will be close enough."

In the strained silence as they left the room, the Chigger continued to look earnestly at his recent accomplice. He was readjusting his opinion.

Like his father, Alicia considered her husband with a puzzled wrinkle between her brows. She felt the electric atmosphere of a crisis, and, unable to conceive what it might produce, but knowing intuitively that it vitally concerned Val, her face shadowed again.

"WELL," spoke his father testily, "you seem to be running this. When d' you start? What is it?"

As Val Moatley gathered his courage to make the confession which he anticipated would turn both father and wife from him, the Chigger laughed.

"'Tain't nothin'," he declared, "'cept 'at the boy there's a good kid an's gonna make a sob spiel for me! He'd 'a' fought like you did, old-timer, on'y he didn't have no chanst. I got the gun on him while he snoozed an' kep' it on him."

He flashed a warning to Val and motioned for silence. When Alicia entered the situation, on her account he had made up his mind to save Val. Now that Val was coming through white, the Chigger was doubly ready to shield him.

"Didn't y' hear him climb on me just's I opened the door?" he demanded. "I had ta throw him in the corner or——"

T. M. Moatley lost his temper. His son was soft, a sentimental clown!

But the wife saw deeper. "Is that all, Val?" she whispered. Her arm went about him comfortingly, protectingly.

"That's all," affirmed the Chigger. "He wants t' be a good feller an' help another feller out. Here, old son!" He tossed the money and bonds at their owner. "Here's yer stuff."

Moatley, Senior, let them lie where they fell. His son was an idiot. "Come, Val," he snapped, "get through with this nonsense."

Val Moatley stood like an image. The Chigger's declaration pounded in his brain. The Chigger offered him a clean bill. His father need never know. Nor—and this was greater—nor Alicia. She would continue to respect him. He could get along without his father's love and respect, but his wife's—that was different. And the Chigger, the man he had led into this trouble, offered him a way.

"Val!" Alicia's whisper reached the Chigger and he knew that this scene had to be terminated. There was something in her tone, in her appealing face, that perturbed him. What was she trying to do?

"Come on," he said. "Let's be goin'. Some o' them dicks'll be glad to see me, y' can believe that; an' some," he smiled reminiscently, "some'll be sore as boils." He winked at T. M. Moatley. "Bring on yer cop, old son, bring on yer cop."

At last the pregnancy of the moment communicated to the father. Alicia's attitude more than anything else, probably, enlightened him that all did not show on the surface. With misgiving he acknowledged the feeling, and his heart sank. He was about to challenge his son when Alicia forestalled him.

"Val! Why don't you—speak?"

"Tell it to yer old man later, kid, if y' wanta make a play for me?" coached the Chigger. "I'll be where y' can find me."

Val Moatley stared at the floor. Now, he told himself again, he was doing this for Alicia, this time in all truth, to keep her from the sorrow of knowing that her husband was a thief.

"Yes," he said lifelessly. "Yes—that was all!"

"*Thataboy!*" applauded the Chigger. He was satisfied. There wasn't anything to be gained by dragging down Val Moatley, who, he judged, had learned his lesson. What would be the sense in bringing grief to this girl who so evidently loved him?

T. M. Moatley breathed his relief. He strode to the door.

"Now we may call the police, I suppose?" he remarked with rich sarcasm.

"Yeh," said the Chigger. "An' tell 'em I want a cab!"

Val Moatley felt his wife's arm tighten convulsively around him. Her hand in his relaxed, then closed into a fist. Her face, which should have been happy, became whiter and the light crept from her eyes. Then the arm that seemed to protect him, slipped away.

His father was opening the door to instruct the butler to summon an officer. The Chigger was viewing a group photo of T. M. Moatley's business associates with as much intensity as though they were his own most intimate friends. He had turned away from Alicia Moatley's searching eyes, so he would not have to look upon the dispiritment and disappointment in them when they were on her husband.

Val Moatley saw them, however. And he also turned away from her.

"Wait, dad," he said. "That was—not all."

The Chigger spun on his heel. "Y' damn fool!" said he.

And because of the way he enunciated the words, T. M. Moatley was persuaded that there *was* more to say. A suspicion of the real state of affairs forced itself upon him. His whole presence suddenly became weary, he waited for his son to speak.

"I—I brought him here," said Val distinctly. He looked squarely at his father. His wife's arm went around him, and strengthened him with a queer exaltation. Her action seemed to tell him that he finally had proved himself—that he was as big a man as—as the Chigger!

"I brought him here to break into the safe," he related evenly. "He was to get a thousand dollars. I was to take the rest."

The dazed, wounded expression that made his father very old, cut the son to the quick. He wanted to say that he was sorry, to beg and receive forgiveness. But that would be too much like whining.

He smiled at the Chigger, who was sputtering disgustedly. He was able to smile because Alicia's head was on his breast and she sought his caress instead of shrinking from him.

"So, dad," his lip trembled on the endearment, "you'll have to send me to prison also."

There was an unexplainable exultation in his heart. He folded his wife closer to him. She lifted her head to smile back at him through her tears.

"I'm proud of you, Val," her whisper echoed in the stillness. "Proud of you for—taking the blame that is yours!"

His father caught at the words. He laughed harshly. How could any one be proud of a thief? Then he saw. His son could have remained silent and let the other man suffer alone.

T. M. Moatley paused. He looked from his son to the little yegg.

"He's a liar!" announced the Chigger cheerfully but vehemently. "I never seen him till I stuck him up in here."

Then T. M. Moatley found himself smiling—wanly, wearily, but smiling, at the trifling, red-headed criminal who so insolently maintained his son's innocence. With a rush it came home to him that Val had shown a courage that was foreign to him—that his boy had emerged from this trial stronger and bigger in spirit!

A quick step and his arms encircled his son and his daughter-in-law.

"We'll forget all this," he said with quiet resolution. "We'll just forget it." Turning he extended his hand to the amazed Chigger. "Thanks!" he said.

"For what? Bustin' yer safe?"

"FOR—for——" Instead of putting it into speech he looked toward the couple whose bond of love was forged the firmer when disruption had threatened.

The Chigger nodded. "I get yuh. And—me?"

For answer T. M. Moatley walked over and opened the door.

"You may go to bed," he told the group of excited, servants. "Good-night."

Again he studied the Chigger's sharp face. He had this little crook to thank for bringing out the manhood in Val. If the Chigger had not taken all the crime upon himself, Val would not have had the opportunity to find himself.

T. M. Moatley picked up the bundle of money which the Chigger had tossed at him. He counted off a thousand dollars. "The pay you were promised," he said.

The Chigger guffawed. The old boy was crazy! But he took the money.

"I'm sorry yer safe——" He headed for the door, then tarried. "Say—how about the can-opener? I use it in me business an' they don't grow on no trees. I'll take——"

His naïveté made T. M. Moatley laugh. "You will not," he said. "I'l keep that as a —" he glanced at Val who was drying his wife's tears—"as a reminder for us all."

"I get yuh!" The Chigger again understood. He jerked his head at Val. "He's seen the light, old-timer; he's off'n this stuff for keeps!"

T. M. Moatley caught his arm. "Why don't you also see the light?" he asked kindly. He liked the skinny, red-headed, nervy shrimp. "If you'll come to see me more, ah, formally than at this meeting, we can talk it over and——"

"Aw, what yuh talkin' about!" interrupted the Chigger. "Don't spoil the party! So long, old-timer! So long—*pal!*—So long, lady——"

His smile embraced them all, and warmed alike by T. M. Moatley's offer of friendship, by Val's parting handshake, and the knowledge that Val Moatley was a better man than he had been an hour ago, but most of all by the soft-spoken good-by of Alicia and the clasp of her hand, the Chigger passed on down the stairs and out into the street. He knew a place where the dice at that hour were just beginning to roll good.

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"Your Loving Son, Nora Bayes"

By Robert C. Benchley

Miss Bayes as Nevada Nell *in "Her Family Tree."*

This is Number Five in a series of American headline entertainers—a series so far including Irene Franklin, Joe Jackson, Beatrice Herford and Al Jolson. Next month comes Frank Tinney, black-face comedian and musical comedy star.

IF NOTHING of the collected literary works of Nora Bayes were to be handed down to posterity other than the above signature, which she affixes to her more intimate letters and newspaper advertisements, it would be enough to differentiate her from the rest of American comediennes. It bespeaks a mad, glorious abandon, a loud and disrespectful laugh at formality and an irresistible gesture of personal comradeship toward you in particular. No matter who else understands, you feel that any one who goes mad enough to sign herself "Your loving son, Nora Bayes," trusts you to understand, and you feel complimented.

There are very few people in the world who can overthrow reason at will. George M. Cohan can, and the success of "The Tavern" shows that the public is not so sensible as the pessimists would have us believe. Nora Bayes can, and nothing, not even Nora Bayes herself, is safe from the devastating effect of her spirit of burlesque. There are but few others who dare really to kid themselves in public.

You have to be just a little crazy to do as Nora Bayes does. And you have to be a little crazy to enjoy it. But the second qualification would seem to embrace nine-tenths of the humming population of the United States, for they all flock to hear her when she comes to town and then flock away again, singing her songs and retailing her lines to the folks at home.

Of course, Miss Bayes is essentially a vaudevillianess. It was on the stage of the old Olympic Theatre in Chicago some fifteen years ago that she first attracted attention as a singer of songs (and it may be said that she had been singing songs for just about four minutes when she attracted attention), and from then on, until her entry into the musical revue, she was a child of the street-drop.

There is very little of the customary struggle for recognition in the career of Miss Bayes. She was recognized the minute she stepped on the stage. You couldn't miss her. Her method of taking a song, perhaps a very ordinary little song, tying a bow on it and leading it out by the hand to a triumphal march down Broadway, was too vaulable a method to allow its owner to remain long in obscurity.

We can therefore offer nothing in the line of heart-breaking anecdotes of repeated rebuffs in the early stage-days of this particular star. No one advised her not to go on the stage. Every one advised her to, and every one was right.

The line of goods which she carried from coast to coast with a big sales record in every town is, of course, songs. Beginning with "Down Where the Wurtzburger Flows" on through "Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly?" most of the songs which come first to your mind when you sit around with the gang humming the old ones were made what they are to-day by Nora Bayes.

And then one day, just as America was beginning to get ready to start getting into the war, George M. Cohan called up Miss Bayes, who was then in a performance of her own called "Two Hours of Song," at the Thirty-Ninth Street Theatre in New York, and said that there was a little thing he had written which she might be able to help him put across. The next day the process of putting "Over There" across began, and it went across so far that people living on the east bank of the Rhine complained of the noise.

It is strange, but all notable achievements in the song-writing line, as in most other lines about which publicity is furnished, seem to have been made in eleventh-hour spurts. People are always rushing in at the last moment and saying, "I must have a cantata about the Babylonian captivity by eleven-thirty to-night," and the hero of the anecdote sits down and in three hours tears off one of the most popular cantatas that Broadway has heard in years.

Thus it was that Ring Lardner came to Nora Bayes one night after a performance of "Ladies First" with a song which he had written. He was willing to take the responsibility for both words and music if she would sing it. The audience was just milling its way out of the theatre when the negotiations opened. Miss Bayes had the song played over for her and gave a word of kindly encouragement to the struggling young humorist. It was a good song, she said, but it needed to have its teeth straightened and several other minor operations performed on it.

"But Miss Bayes," said Mr. Lardner in his well-known Chesterfieldian manner, "pardon the slang, but I have to 'catch' an early morning train for Chicago."

"Then we will fix it right now," said Nora.

So they sat down in the empty, darkened theatre and worked until the Lardner special left for Chicago the next morning, with a completed revision of "Prohibition Blues" to show for it.

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It is difficult to explain just what Nora Bayes puts into a song to make it more than a song. In the first place, she puts the audience into it. She reaches out and picks you out of your seat and drags you up on the stage with her, and before you know it you are walking up and down behind the foot-lights and singing it too. You feel that the song was written to be sung by Nora Bayes and you.

But the chief ingredient which she puts into the making of a song hit is Nora Bayes. And that is something that a third person can't explain without trying to give an imitation. And seeing an imitation of Nora Bayes is worse than not seeing her at all.

This ability for putting songs across, while it has made Nora Bayes the popular songstress of America, has also made her the most sought-after woman in Tin-Pan Alley. Every one who has written a song, or (as is more often the case) rewritten some one else's song, every one who has dreams of his own particular arrangement of sharps and flats being tried over on the pianos of the nation, hurries to Nora Bayes with it, knowing that if any one in the world can breathe the breath of life into it she can.

In her dressing-room at the theatre where she is playing in her own production entitled "Her Family Tree," Miss Bayes has four private secretaries helping her to keep the walks clear of sheets of music submitted by aspiring writers. On one Saturday recently there were forty-three composers standing in line waiting to hum the first three bars over to her. It is a safe bet that among the titles which were written especially for a decorative treatment around an oval picture of Nora Bayes, were the following, or something like them: "When My Baby Laughs," "Brown-Eyes," "In My Wigwam," "When My Baby Cries," "Gray-Eyes," "In My Little Log Cabin," "Cryin' for You," "Lucy," "Green-Eyes," "Longin' for You," "Waitin' for You," etc., etc.

The funny part of all this is that Nora Bayes hears them all. Every one with a song gets a chance. One night a short time ago a woman came in with what she considered a sure-fire hit. It was a cold night and although she said that she really had a nice warm coat at home and had merely forgot to put it on, there was something about the cold, red line of wrist between the cuff of her coat and her glove that spoiled her story. Furthermore, while her shoes might have been excused on the ground of comfort, the chances were that they were anything but comfortable that night.

MISS BAYES took the song and played it over, and in some manner or other got the conversation around to how good a nice hot cup of coffee would taste. As the woman offered no violent opposition, the coffee was served and the song was played over again. There was something in the music that struck Miss Bayes as being possible of development and she asked the woman if she would mind working it over for her. And while she was working on it, she might just as well take a room in a near-by hotel and send the bill each week to Miss Bayes. It would be so much simpler for all concerned. So the woman is now ensconced in a warm room, inking-in grace-notes, and there is no telling how long Miss Bayes will keep her at it.

All over the country there are young boys and girls who are sending the bill each week to Nora Bayes. She has protégés in all kinds of schools, youngsters who have come to her attention on her trips as being promising subjects for an education they could not otherwise have. The financial drain on her resources in the form of term-bills and laboratory-fees and other incidentals of school expense for her numerous beneficiaries would entitle her to sign herself "Your loving father, Nora," if she so desired.

One of her forms of service is in a line not particularly popular among dilettante social workers. She has a sneaking feeling that the negro is not being given a square deal in this country, and she is willing to see to it personally that as many colored boys and girls as possible are started in the uneven race at least at scratch. Miss Bayes even takes a chance on social ostracism on her Southern circuit and includes negroes in her list of young people who may call her "Nora."

All of this is a part of her religion, and Nora Bayes's religion is deserving of a story all by itself. There isn't much theology in it, but it sounds like a fairly workable theory of living. The basis of it all is that it doesn't pay to hold a grudge against any one. A grudge is a boomerang, according to the high priestess of this cult, and just as you think you have sent it off on a dotted line for the base of some one's brain, you are suddenly confronted by it returning with considerable force in the general direction of your own head. It is not practical, that's all. The best thing to do is to forget it and smile. And when Nora Bayes smiles, it is something to tell about.

All this sounds terribly like some sort of glad game. If you didn't know her, you might picture her as Pollyanna in a gingham apron prancing about and insulting people by telling them that they should look happy. And if it weren't Nora Bayes who did and said all this, there might very well be a charge of cheeri-o made against her. But somehow you don't mind an evangelical optimist when she kids herself and you and every one else concerned.

According to her, the whole secret of the thing is to sing a lot. No matter whether you can sing or not, get as near as you can to it. Make a good loud noise and work your eyebrows as if you were singing. Anything so long as you give the effect to yourself.

This may be all very well, and probably Miss Bayes knows what she is talking about, but it's bad advice just the same. Granted that there is great benefit to be derived by the singer from the physical and mental exercise of opening the larynx and the soul in a burst of what might or might not pass for song. But how about the people in the same house? Haven't they a God-given right to be happy? If the idea is to dispense the greatest happiness to the greatest number, then advice such as that given by Miss Bayes is dangerous.

But this is a detail. On the whole, her theory of existence seems to be one which, if generally practised, would end in one of the best little millennia ever seen in these parts. In such an ideal state Nora Bayes would be President and would sing her messages to Congress standing on the rostrum, with both Houses joining in the chorus.

The lady who put "Over There" over.

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A flock of fluttering flu germs landed on me and started digging in for the long, hard winter.

Plague o' My Hearth

By Walter De Leon

I WAS spending the worst summer after the worst season I'd had in twenty years of show-business, when to make it good and bad, a flock of fluttering flu germs landed on me and started digging in for the long, hard winter that was staring me in the face. And it was only because Freda Tishaar, a perfect stranger in the same boarding-house, was superstitious about living places where fatalities happened, that the coroner's cart was kept from backing up to the door.

Freda was Swedish by nature and breeding, and in her day had been a tight-wire walker of charm and distinction. At the age of thirty-five she had retired with a busted ankle, twenty pounds of excess baggage between her knees and shoulders and a bank account of large but unmeasured size.

As the days came and went, with me lying in bed and Freda concocting soups and egg-nogs for to give me strength to get up and look for a job, I seen she had fallen for me. Maybe it was my gray hair, or the character lines which God and Greek restaurants had chiselled in my countenance; maybe it was because I treated her like a lady instead of an acrobat; anyway, I seen clearer each day that the frank, engrossing emotions of what's-her-name—Cleopatra—had not been denied to Freda.

SINCE I had left home as an ambitious youth, no woman had waited on me who didn't expect to find a dime on the table somewhere. Not only did Freda serve the inner man, but for weeks the sun never set upon a day which hadn't seen a buttonless shirt or a ventilated sock made whole again. Both of us being old troupers, we knew a lot of the same people and shared the same adverse opinion about American-plan hotels, Sunday shows and Sioux Falls, South Dakota. This here what they call propinquity was working overtime.

The afternoon she lets me have my first cigar, I'm sitting propped up in a big easy chair watching Freda stage an omelet soufflé. I notice the placid contented look on her face.

"What a wonderful wife you'd make," I say, abstractly.

Freda looks at me and then back to the omelet.

"Not so good at first, maybe," she replies in the quaint accents of her native heath which no amount of contact with theatrical managers had been able to corrupt.

"Good enough for me," I say.

Freda flushes.

"I tell you something, Billy. If I don't make you a good wife, you don't have to stay married to me."

That was my cue. I'd brought it on myself. Instinct and an invalid inclination tell me there's nothing left for me but to make the big speech. We set the wedding for the middle of September.

The first of that month, after finding a three-months board bill, no touchable friends and no human who could be induced to hire a good piano player, I'm sitting in my room trying to think up some sentimental way of telling Freda that my doctor and landlady are both yearning to receipt their bills, when she comes in and lays a check—a pale green-colored check—on my table. It's made out to me, signed by Freda, and it's for one thousand dollars.

"Who is it you want killed, darling?" I ask her.

"No. That is my dower," Freda says. Then she goes on to explain how in her country if the bride can't offer the groom nothing more valuable than her promise to love, honor and obey, she's out of luck.

"But listen; you're in America now. I can't take money from you—before we're married," I say, wondering who I know that can cash a check that size.

"I tell you something," Freda replies, smiling in her calm, athletic way. "My father, he give me that money when I am sixteen. I get interest on it all these years. You take it." She coyly slams a kiss on my cheek and exits.

The next day, after I've reestablished my credit, I and Freda is sitting in a movie house where I'd been trying to land a job and hadn't, when she says to me:

"After we get married, where are we going to live?"

"Where do you want to live?" I stall.

"New Jersey, I think," Freda tells me. "On a farm."

"I don't know any farmer who'll invite us," I says.

"We buy a farm, I think," Freda replies.

"With who's money?" I want to know.

FREDA thinks that over. Then she says in the firm, un abashed manner that was her outstanding peculiarity, "*I* buy the farm, Billy. Then someday, when we have the big fight and you go away, I still have some place to live."

"Freda," I protest, "you get me wrong. I was only thinking would you be comfortable out on an unsanitary farm with me on the road, traveling in vaudeville."

"I tell you, Billy," says my introspective bride. "I think you don't go on the road this season. You and me—we live together on the farm."

That was a new idea, but sensible. It looked like a tough year for show-business. I was just up out of a dying-bed and really wasn't strong enough to do much but lie around the house. What a world of good six months of the simple life would do me, out in a swell little country home with nothing to do but inhale the perfumes of nature and age eggs for the markets of New York and Philly.

"There's some nifty little places up around East Orange," I tell Freda. "All modern conveniences, garage——"

"I tell you something," Freda whispers. "I got already the farm. I pay deposit last week. After we get married I show it to you. I think you be surprised."

The day before the marriage and the real-estate deeds is done, it hits me that if

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Freda concocted soups and egg-nogs for to give me strength to get up and look for a job.

anything snould happen between I and Freda of a serious nature, it wouldn't do me no harm to be able to go back into the show-business again. So I dog it up to Max Hardblatt's, my agent, who had booked me for all the jobs I'd worked the last three seasons.

"Listen, Max," I says, laying on his desk four weeks' commission I'd forgot to pay him, "I'm getting married. We're going down to our country place for a while. I don't think I'll work any this season."

"So do I," Max says.

"But," I go on, "a fellow never knows what's going to happen, and ——"

MAX has taken out his wallet to put the bills I'd gave him into, and a couple of checks has fallen out. One—a pale-green-colored check—falls face up. I see the writing on it is small, like Freda's. Out of politeness I bend over to pick it up. Max bends at the same time. Ivory clicks on ivory, and Max lets out a holler as he quickly jams the check into his pocket. It strikes me maybe Max used to be Freda's agent and she has settled up with him before settling down with me.

"Listen," I say, "did you ever handle Freda Tishaar?"

"No—er, yes," Max stammers. "I handled her for years."

"Funny I never seen her around the office here," I answer.

"She was always out on the road working," Max says, opening the door for me, outward. "*She* had a *good* act."

A couple of days later Freda takes me down to see the farm. It sure was a surprise. She had picked out twenty-four acres of jungle four miles from a railroad station which never would be closer than two hours from Broadway. It wasn't even an abandoned farm. This place had never been trampled by the foot of man since George Washington had passed over it and chose Valley Forge instead. Large quantities of useless trees rose above what the explorers call impenetrable underbrush.

"You didn't buy a farm. You bought a discouraged shooting preserve," I tell my wife.

"We'll clear it," Freda says.

"I'll get the permit for using the dynamite," I says.

"First, though, we build a house," Freda says. "I'll get a carpenter to help you."

"Listen," I says, not wishing to start an argument so soon after getting married. "There's a firm out in Chicago that's got houses all built. All you have to do is to pick out the pattern you want and they ship it to you, wall by wall."

"I show you the plans I draw myself," Freda answers, calm and confident. She digs a piece of wrapping-paper out of her bag, shows it to me and asks me what do I think.

"Well," I say, diplomatic, "later, by widening the front door, it'll make a passable garage. But even as it is, it'll take carpenters to build it."

"We get one," says Freda.

After four days scouting without finding no helping hands, Freda finally secured the services of one Cecil Herringworth, a sturdy octogenarian, reclaimed from the almshouse, who was willing for board, lodging and fifty cents a day to prove that, besides being a builder, he knew all there was to know about the farming business. So the three of us start laying the foundations of our future life.

Cecil qualified the first day as an expert workman. He spent half his time sharpening his tools, and the other half figuring the best way to do something he couldn't do till he'd sharpened his tools again.

"I wish Oscar, my brother, was here," Freda wishes one day to me as we're holding up one side of the house while waiting for Cecil to decide what size nails he should use. "Oscar knows all about how to carpenter."

"Let's send for him," I says, trying to keep a large red ant from climbing up my leg any further. "Where is he?"

"In Sweden," Freda answers.

"I understand there's some good carpenters in China, too," I tell her.

"Oscar, my brother, is better carpenter than Chinamen," Freda says. "Anyway, he's better than Cecil."

"Cecil ain't a carpenter," I says. "He's a board of estimate."

Generally a fellow thinks of a honeymoon as a period of rest and relaxation. I spent mine with a hammer in one hand, a splinter in the other and a pain in my back. It was only the supporting affection and food that Freda showered on me, and the belief that after the house was built I could lie around and recover for twenty-four hours every day that kept me on the job.

II

THE first time that Freda and me had what you could call words, was when we bought our car, a couple of days before we moved into our new little nest in the forest. We're fitting the floor into the kitchen when I say:

"We should have a practical car; one that'll stand up on these country roads; a snappy Stutz roadster, maybe; or better yet for the cold weather, a Cadillac Sedan."

Freda ponders that.

"We got to have a car we can move furniture and chicken-feed in," she says.

"Get a Packard, then," I says. "They live on punishment."

"Yes," says my wife, nodding her head, "we buy a Ford, a nice second-hand Ford."

"Where do you get that second-hand stuff?" I yell, dropping a hammer on Cecil's foot. "Why not a new car?"

"A new car, you never know how good it is," Freda tells me, picking up a barrel of nails that was in her way. "If a car is second-hand, it shows it can run. Oscar, my brother, he knows all about how to buy cars. He told me."

Cecil chooses a file to edge a saw with, and creaks:

"The 1911 Ford is the best car Henry ever turned out. Materials are better, and the engine—my goodness, what an engine!"

"Where can I get a 1911 Ford?" Freda asks.

"You can't," Cecil tells her. "Nobody that's got one will sell it."

That settled it as far as Freda was concerned, and a couple of days later we walk over to an old man's place, who's retiring from the farming game, to look at his 1911 model. His name is Spivey, and he takes us out to where something under a tarpaulin is parked alongside the hog-run.

"I'VE had her since the Spring of 1912," Spivey brags, "and she's never made me any more trouble one day than the next."

Then he unveils the work of artisans, as the fellow says. That's one thing where a horse has got it over an automobile. A horse can grow old graceful. This car hasn't had a rub-down since the heavy rains of 1912.

"Little mite rusty from standing out here in all weathers," Spivey admits, "but mechanically she's perfect. Wait till I turn her over." Before I can tell him she looks bad enough right side up, he's out in front winding her up. A noise like eight thousand machine guns rends the sodden air surrounding the hog-run.

"What's that!" I yell.

"Power," Spivey screams. "She'll climb

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Generally a fellow thinks of a honeymoon as a rest. I spent mine with splinters in my hands and a pain in my back.

"So *that's* what you've been doing with her," I says, looking at her palsied fenders.

"How much?" says Freda, emerging from the blue cloud the antique was shrouding herself in.

"Four fifty," Spivey answers.

Friend wife digs down in her bag and counts one hundred and seventy-five dollars into his hand.

"Freda," I groan, "don't be so impetuous. You can't insult our friends by asking them to ride in a car like this."

"Friends?" Freda asks. "We ain't going to take friends riding. We're going to carry fertilizer in this car."

"BUT not for one hundred and seventy-five dollars," says Spivey.

That starts a three-cornered battle royal which ends by Spivey taking the one hundred and seventy-five dollars and me driving Freda home with three dollars worth of wheel-barrow and a dozen eggs in the tonneau

That night after dinner—and what a mean frying-pan Freda juggled!—I say to her:

"What was the joke in that fertilizer crack you made this afternoon?"

"Fertilizer; for the crops," my wife explains.

"Crops!" I laugh. "You can't get close enough to the ground in our private jungle to plant any crops."

"To-morrow we start clearing," Freda informs me, "so you can plow."

"Listen," I say. "I'm a piano-player—not a plower. Besides I'm not strong enough to stand clearing. Why didn't you tell me you was going into the farming business in earnest?"

Freda looks at me as unruffled as a saucer of molasses.

"Oscar, my brother, he knows all about how to plow," she says.

Cecil shakes the cake crums out of his beard.

"If we're going to start clearing tomorrow, guess I'd better begin sharpening the axes."

After Freda hits the hay that night, I drop a line to Max Hardblatt, the agent, saying that I am much stronger now and if he gets a chance to place me, I'm interested.

True to her threat, next day Freda corralled a couple of mentally constricted laborers, and with Cecil grinding our grubbing hoes and axes and telling us how, we begun deforesting our prehistoric acres. Even then, after the first heavy snow fell, we couldn't cut enough wood to keep us warm in the house. Freda said something was wrong with the flue of the stove, and if Oscar was there he could fix it.

One day a tree fell the wrong way. I had it aimed for Cecil, but it fell backward on to me, and I spent a hard-earned week's vacation in bed letting Freda massage my vertebræ into position. It was during that time that I realized I had been too kind-hearted with my wife. I had let her have her own way so much during the first months of our double life that now she was used to it. I told myself that, while Charity should begin at home, it was every man's duty to spread as much sunshine as he could, and I figured that as much as Freda and me would miss each other, still the thousands of theatre patrons who would be gladdened by my music, outweighed any purely selfish motives I might have about staying on the farm and plowing for the spring crop. I felt my close associating with Nature at her carelessest had give me a greater power of interpreting the art of music, and that my what they call vision and understanding had broadened even faster than my hands and feet had.

So I drop another line to Max Hardblatt, telling him that now I am fully recovered and am willing to accept a job at my usual salary. I don't say anything to Freda about the note. I figure it'll be time enough when Max sends me my contract and the route.

"What are you going to plant?" Cecil asks one night, sitting where he blocked all the heat from the stove. "I guess potatoes, eh? Potatoes."

"Why should we plant potatoes?" I ask.

"Everybody else is," Cecil replies.

"Why?" Freda inquires.

"Last year everybody planted tomatoes. All but Jim Applestote," Cecil answers, sharpening a toothpick. "Jim planted potatoes. Along come summer—My Goodness, the price of tomatoes went way down and potatoes went way up. Jim was the only farmer in twenty miles to make any money. Potatoes done it. So this year everybody is going to plant potatoes and make money, too. Ain't a tomato going to be growed."

"Yes," says Freda, "we plant tomatoes, I think."

Cecil and I argue till we run out of words. When I see that Freda couldn't be converted to potatoes, I switched and started plugging wheat, which you can plant by standing up and scattering it, instead of stooping over and inserting each separate bush into the ground, like you have to with tomatoes.

About the time I think I've got Freda wabbling, she says:

"Yes, we plant tomatoes. Oscar, my brother, he likes tomatoes."

Next day, after Cecil had explained the loving care tomatoes crave before they are fit for the salad bowl or the catsup bottle, I took it up again with the wife. I kept taking it up every other day for the rest of the winter. We didn't have no bitter quarrels—that is, Freda never got bitter, and the food and affection she lavished on me was beyond reproach. But as each day would end with no word from Max Hardblatt, and another tomato argument lost, I felt I was losing my individuality; I suspected that Freda was smothering my personality with passion and meat pies; and that I was like that bird in the Bible, what's-his-name—Esau—that sold his birthright for a pot of mush.

III

COMES spring, and Freda and I start for the slips, as they call young tomatoes bushes. It was a dark day, so I put the top up on the old Ford before wheeling it around to the kitchen door.

"Why you have the top up?" Freda asks. "Put it down, eh?"

"Why?" I says.

"I like it better down, I think," Freda answers.

"You'll have to think up a better reason than that to make me untie all them pieces of rope," I says, priming four cylinders and seeing is my first-aid kit intact.

"You better put it down," says my placid helpmeet.

I pretend I don't hear her.

We'd no more than started when the peevish March wind that had been blowing turned into a rousing hurricane. We buck it for about ten miles before Freda says again:

"Better put the top down."

I'm too busy coaxing the car up a long grade to bother with her. Just as I make the top of the hill, all the wind in the world hits us in one blast. Zowie! goes the old top off the car. There wasn't enough cloth left in any one piece wide enough to cover a doll-buggy.

"I told you," says Freda, tearing off a couple of streamers hanging down over the wind-shield.

Before I can think of anything both husbandly and clever, a cloudburst opens on

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Cecil Herringworth, a sturdy octogenarian, besides being a builder, knew all there was to know about farming.

us. In two minutes we're wet to the hide. I'm reaching around in the back of the car to get an old rain-coat, intending to put it over the hood of the engine before it also gets drowned out, when Freda says:

"You better put on your rain-coat."

"No," I says, remembering that besides being my wife, whenever she catches a cold it settles in her stiff ankle and pains the whole family, "no; you put it on."

"I'm too wet," says Freda. "You put it on."

Suddenly I get a hunch that now is the time, the physical moment, as the fellow says, to assert my rights; to show her I was a husband and not a hired man; to convince her, once for all, that manly instincts is still dormant in me and that I still have red blood in my veins and not tomato-juice.

"LISTEN," I say, putting a cold steel look in the eye I turn her way. "I don't want to hear nothing more out of you. Put this coat on!"

Freda looks at me—a new expression in her blue eyes.

"No," she says.

"You'll put it on or I'll know the reason why," I says, wondering why I hadn't never pulled the caveman stuff on her before. "Put it on," I bark.

"No," says Freda.

"Don't say no to me," I holler. "Up to now I've always shown you all the kindness you deserve. But this is different. You put that coat on!"

"No," says Freda.

I drive the car to one side of the road and stop.

"What are you doing?" Freda asks.

"I'm going to put you into this coat," I says, standing up and letting the rain that had accumulated down my back roll down my trouser-leg unheeded.

"You're going to put the coat on me?" asks Freda, a strange light illuminating her eye.

"I am," I say, matching her, eye for eye.

"No," Freda decides. "I get out of the car first."

"If you get out of this car, it'll be wearing this coat," I tell her. "Hold out your arms."

For answer, Freda hops out of the car and starts walking back the twelve miles to our little hermitage. I yell at her. She don't pay any more attention to me than to the rain. I watch her long ungraceful strides as she disappears around a bend of the road.

"She won't stick it out," I tell myself. "In about five minutes she'll be coming back. *But*, she don't get in this chariot till she puts on the rain-coat."

Five minutes pass—Nothing happens but the rain. Ten minutes—Freda sure must be wet. Fifteen minutes—I begin to wonder has she slipped and fell or something. Twenty minutes, and I turn the car around to see how many of them twelve wet miles her stubbornness will carry her. Pretty soon I see her slogging through the canals the ruts had become. She ain't even looking back.

It dawns on me that I've picked a bum day for my battle. Discipline is all right in its way, but so is common sense. When I see Freda's gingham skirt flapping around her ankles—and one of them not so good—and see how her white cotton shirt-waist is sticking to her back and shoulders, I can't help remembering that she is the woman who robbed the flu germs of their prey; the woman whose dower paid my bills. Also, I remember it is early spring of a terrible theatrical season and that what I had left of the dower wasn't nothing to warrant signing no declaration of independence about.

I'm so busy thinking that I catch up to her before I know it. I look at her face, all streaked with blue and red and green from the fading flowers on her straw hat. Then I stop the car and open the door.

"You win," I say.

Freda looks at me, and for the first time since I've known her she starts crying.

"Now, cut that out," I say, taking her arm. "You don't have to walk no farther."

"But I *should* have to," Freda sobs. "I'm disappointed."

"What!" I holler.

"When I get out of the car and you let me start walking, I say to myself, 'Now, Freda, you will get fresh with Billy, eh? Now, you gotta walk home. Serve you right.' I am happy because I got a man I can't get fresh with. I say, 'Billy, he's well now. He can take charge of a few things now.' And just when I am so happy and proud of you, you spoil it all. Billy, why you not *make* me walk home when I get fresh with you? Now I got to keep on being boss." Freda wrings out the bottom of her skirt and wipes her eyes.

I'm so mad I can't talk. And all the way home I keep getting madder and madder. It wasn't so much the present as the future which was getting my nanny. What was I going to do with her? Wasn't there any one who could tell me how to handle my temperamental Swede? Wasn't there some one she respected, who— Like a flash of lightning came the answer—Oscar!

Oscar, the brother—the carpenter—the plower—the tomato lover! Oscar, the new overseer of our farm—the new man-of-all-work—the new goat—the resident manager when I'm out on the road!

That night I ask my wife how long it's been since she has seen Oscar. She tells me ten years. Then I start telling her what a wonderful thing it would be for both of them to bring Oscar over and let him live with us while he was learning to speak the language. Freda don't blaze with the enthusiasm I expected. I figure maybe she's lukewarm on account of it's costing so much jack and she don't want to spend it just at present.

"Listen," I say. "Don't worry about the money. I'll pay all the transportation myself."

It took all but two dollars of what was left of the dower, but the day we got the letter saying Oscar was leaving on the next steamer, I went out into our broad fields and cultivated and caressed seven hundred and thirty-five tomato bushes, oblivious to everything except the glad, joyous ensemble of the carefree song-birds, mating in the wildwood.

Oscar is due May first. So I drop a note to Max Hardblatt, saying I'm anxious to get in a few weeks before the season closes and will be at liberty on May second.

The big day comes. We park our top-less car in Jersey City, and cross the ferry. I feel myself rise in Freda's regard by my flat profane refusal to drive our relic into New York. We watch the big steamer warp into the pier.

THE steerage passengers start down the gang-plank. I'm looking for a large, blond, male human about six feet tall, with intelligence and no ambition stamped on his map, when Freda lets loose a Valkyrie shriek.

"Oscar!" she sirens.

I look. Hopping down the gangway, grinning at Freda, is a tall, homely, broad-shouldered guy that could have licked Dempsey if it wasn't that his right arm and left leg were both missing. Everything goes black in front of me for a second. I look again. Oscar has one arm and one leg; no more and no less. There's one lingering hope left, and the first chance I get I look at the palm of his hand. What I see tells me the worst has happened. He don't even work his crutch enough to raise a single

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"I've had her since the spring of 1912," Spivey brags, "and she never made me any more trouble one day than the next."

callus. It's as soft as mine used to be before I shook Mozart for matrimony.

We drive back to the farm in silence. That is, I was silent. The steady stream of slow Swedish syllables mingling with the engine exhaust back of us didn't interest me at all. I was thinking of twenty acres of tomatoes that somebody had to raise and pick before the summer was over. And there wasn't no question who that somebody was. They may hang wall-paper and drive autos, but no one-armed man has ever yet picked tomatoes successfully.

IV

RIGHT from the jump-off, I and Oscar was as congenial as pigs'-knuckles and cream puffs. Ever since I'd been married, no matter what was spoke of, according to Freda, Oscar knew all about it. It took me just two days to learn he didn't know nothing good about anything. He spent one whole day finding fault and knocking the house I and Freda and Cecil had built. Next he panned the way I'd plowed our primeval meadows. Then he roasted the way I drove the Ford. He couldn't see nothing right in the way the tomatoes was laid out, and even the color of the eggs our hens laid was wrong. Nothing on the place, to listen to him, was in the same class as even the worst features of his other sister's farm in Sweden.

Not only was he outspoken, but he was long-spoken. Now nobody was taking pictures of our place to run in no model farm magazine, but when I saw the changes which had been made during the year, all the improvements and things which I and Cecil had accomplished by main strength and ignorance, the answers I begun giving to Oscar's anvil choruses soon lost all taint of politeness and courtesy. This family feeling between us wasn't helped none by the way he talked after he found out I was a vaudeville piano player. Right away he took it for granted that now he was there, I'd chase out on the road and leave my farm and home for him to run.

At the finish of every objection and flaw he discovered and minutely explained, he would say:

"Well, we change that next year when Billy, he goes on the road."

The first couple of times he pulled it, he caught me without an answer. The next couple of times, I looked to see how Freda was receiving the news. As far as I could tell it was all right by her. Leastwise she never said anything.

And so as days of field-labor followed nights of family argument and insult, with Freda sitting back doing the innocent bystander, I began to wonder did she really wish me to go out on the road. I began to wonder was it possible Oscar was alienating my wife and farm away from me. Also, I began to admit that the aboriginal existence I had dragged myself through the past year, besides making a newer and better man of me, had developed a strange charm and fascination for me which increased every time the thought of leaving it smote my mind. More and keener I begun to believe in this here cosmic circle; meaning that man was made for woman, woman for the home and home for the woman's man.

A couple of times I tried to talk it out with Freda, but friend wife had changed a lot. She was more quiet, she didn't smile so much and she didn't seem to take the same pride in her cooking she always had. Every once in a while, for no reason at all, she'd get temperamental, snapping out up-stage remarks and making quick exits accompanied by door-slams. It was plain she had something disturbing on her chest; but I never could work up enough kidding atmosphere to make it easy to ask her what it was.

One afternoon I'm coming home from New Brunswick in the Ford, already three-quarters of an hour late for dinner, when I get three blow-outs in two miles, with no human to help me change tires and pump. Thinking over my domestic complication as I'm putting the air into the third tire, suddenly I see the whole works. Freda has lost her taste for me.

The rain-storm row had first turned her against me. Then Oscar, with his masterful manner and persuasive panning, had showed me up proper to her. Between them they had agreed to ease me out on the road again and make me play piano for a lot of small-timers, live in almost modern hotels and spend my leisure hours searching for some place where the coffee was drinkable. After me doing all the hard work, Oscar was figuring on prying me loose and reaping the benefits and profits of my loving labors. And when I compared the troubles and worries of life on the road with the honest, unaffected simpleness of my farm, I begun asking the whispering trees along the highway what was so wrong with me that nobody wanted me around.

It's dark when I turn the good little old Ford off the main road and see the lamp in our cozy kitchen shining yellow and cheerful through the curtains I and Freda had hung and sewed. It hits me intensely just how blissful had been our fireside until my money had brought to us Oscar, the Swedish cricket, knocking on our hearth.

There's a letter in the home-made R. F. D. box in one of Max Hardblatt's envelopes. Thinking it's for me, I open it. It reads:

DEAR FRIEND FREDA:

Your last check received this morning and thanks for same. Don't send me any more, as you have sent more money now than I would have made in commissions from booking Billy this season.

Besides, if Billy has been doing all the work you say he has, he can't possibly get his hands in condition to play piano till after your crops are in. Maybe the profits from the tomatoes which you state you are going to give him will convince Billy that as a pianist he's a successful farmer.

Best wishes,

MAX.

Hungry as I am, I go out behind the chicken-house to think it all out. I seen now why Max had never answered my notes. I seen, too, that it was cheaper for Freda to pay Max to keep me off the road than it was to pay two men wages for doing the work I had did. But the big question I can't find no answer to is this: why, if my dope was right and Freda wished me to go out on the road, why had she sent just a couple of days ago a check to Max to keep me out of work? Only one person can answer that—Freda. I gather myself and go toward the house.

I'm just about to open the kitchen door when I hear voices raised in loud argument. That is, Freda's voice was loud.

"You don't like the way I cook meat pies, eh?" she's shouting at Oscar. "I tell you something. I don't care if you like it or you don't like it. Billy, he likes it." Freda hammers the table with a muscular mitt, and glares at her brother.

A FUNNY sensation—like stepping out into the crisp evening air of autumn after taking a real hot bath—runs over me. Freda was sticking up *for me!*

"Well," says Oscar, pacifyingly, "next year when Billy goes on the road—" and that's as far as he got.

"What you mean—when he goes on the road? I don't want Billy to go on the road. I won't *let* him." Freda's voice drops. When she goes on her words come quiet and steady like they do when a person is

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"Some day maybe you make Oscar so mad he pay his own way back to the old country," friend wife whispers.

saying what he's thinking instead of thinking what he's saying.

"For twenty years, since I am fifteen, I work hard. I live all by myself, make my own clothes and hats. Most my meals I cook on gas-jets in hotels. Summer and winter I work just the same, saving all my money. Why? All these years I tell myself, 'Freda, some day you fall off the tight-wire and break your neck maybe. Then you can't work any more and you must have money for to buy a home and get a husband and live like other women.' So I keep working hard and saving hard.

"Just like I say, one night I fall off the wire. 'Now,' I say while the doctor he sets my ankle, 'Now, I get me my little home and nice man.' I am so happy because I have saved.

"Then I meet Billy. Poor Billy, he is sick, down and out, with no money and no friend. Billy, he's got a heart the biggest in the world. I got enough money for two. I like Billy and Billy, he like me. We get married. The doctor say Billy needs outdoor work to be well and strong and live a long time with me. So I give him plenty. I am so happy. I am too old for children, but I have Billy, and he—he tears holes in clothes and is trouble around the kitchen more as whole family of kids.

"FOR twenty years Billy has travel—travel—like me. He don't know anything else. Pretty soon he begins to think he should travel some more. I see I got to fight to keep Billy on the farm so he can get strong and live with me a long time. So I send money to keep him with me. I cook what he likes to keep him. Every day I find something for Billy to do to keep him. I tell you, I fight like hell to keep Billy.

"And I am winning when you come and begin to drive him away. All the time you make fun what he does. Everything he says you laugh and say he is wrong. Fifty times a day you say, 'When Billy goes on the road.' I don't want Billy to go on road. I don't care to make money from the farm. I don't want profits. I want a home—and Billy." Freda's voice breaks and the big tears start rolling down her cheeks.

That's enough for me. I bust into the room seeing red in all directions.

"Listen, you," I holler to Oscar, slipping my arm around Freda's shoulders. "There ain't anybody in the world that's got the right to make my wife cry but me." I'm so mad I ain't saying what I mean at all, just sputtering and choking and all upheaved inside. "And there ain't anybody in the world that's got the right to tell me what Im going to do or where I'm going to go but Freda."

My wife slips an arm around my neck and gazes through her tears at me with a look that messes up completely the few remaining words I'm trying to control.

"Maybe we haven't got much of a farm—yet. But it satisfies *us*. I've spent the greatest year of my life building a home for I and Freda to spend our declining years in, and there's no human in this world, Heaven or Sweden who can will-power me out of it now, next season or ever."

The arm around my Adam's apple gives a joyous jerk. As soon as I get my wind, I'm off again.

"I'm going to stay right here and raise red tomatoes and brown eggs till I'm blue in the face. And by steady working and hard saving, maybe some day I'll have enough money to send you back where you came from."

"Billy, I lend you the money," cries Freda with a light in her eyes like ten thousand angels.

"I owe you too much now," I says. "But in the meantime," I tell Oscar, putting Freda in a chair and patting her back, "as long as you remain here, as long as you continue to spill pipe ashes and nasty remarks around the house, you lay off of Freda! She's married to me; not you. Don't forget: from now on there's only one boss around this joint, and that boss is going to be——"

Before I can say "Freda," my wife does a flying leap from the chair on to my palpitating chest and smacks a rousing kiss on my weather-beaten face.

"Billy," she sings. "Billy! At last you going to be boss. Now everything is all right again."

I KEEP still. For when I see the old, placid, contented look once more on her face, when I see her clearing a place at the supper-table for me, I realize that the crisis is past. I realize that the incense from the kitchen oven, the little Ford outside gathering the gentle evening dew on every seat and fender, the youthful tomatoes blushing 'neath the silvery moon and the wife of my bosom is mine, all mine, now and indefinitely.

Just before we drop off to sleep that night, Freda says:

"Billy, because he is my brother, you don't have to be nice to Oscar."

"I got no intention of being nice to him," I say.

"Because I tell you something," friend wife whispers. "Oscar, he's got plenty money. Some day maybe you make him so mad he pay his own way home."

"I wonder when the next steamer sails," I says.

Freda slings an acrobatic arm around my neck and hugs me close.

"What's that for?" I gasp, surprised.

"The way you talk to Oscar. You—you never going to let anybody get fresh with you again, eh, Billy?"

"No, ma'm," I swear. "*Nobody.*"

"But me," says Freda.

I don't say nothing. Twelve o'clock at night is no time to start an argument on a farm. Besides, I don't know what she expects me to say.

Mr. De Leon, whose newest musical comedy, "The Pink Slip," written for Bert Williams, star of so many Ziegfeld shows, should be under way about the time this issue of EVERYBODY'S reaches the stands, will be represented in an early issue by "In Hell Hole Swamp," a story of the remotest Carolina backwoods.

Two short stories of unusual excellence will head the list of contributions to EVERYBODY'S for June. In "The Mysterious Stranger Defense," by Melville Davisson Post, the solution of a mysterious crime is revealed as the result of a tense court-room cross-examination. The small boy who inadvertently "spills the beans" is the hero of L. H. Robbins's humorous story, "Mr. Downey Sits Down," in which an extraordinary composition by a primary-school youngster receives unexpected publicity that sets the business and social world of his town by the ears.

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Strangle-Hold

By Frederick Orin Bartlett

LEWIS, president and controlling stock owner of the Pontiac corporation, was known to the trade as a manufacturer of woolen yarns—a business in which, with his five large mills, he was the most important individual factor in New England. There were plenty of impartial observers who used to wonder why the man was not in jail; for the things he did with his fifty-one per cent. of stock and the aid of subsidiary companies to the remaining forty-nine per cent. owned by the general public were patent enough. The answer was that he had the advice of the best legal talent in the United States—it was they who instructed him how to keep within the law—and paid ten per cent. out of what was left after he was all through skimming the cream. Most any one can manage this and keep his reputation, provided only he makes enough money to pay ten per cent. on the common.

The really baffling problem was how a man who knew so little about the business itself was able to make it earn so much. He started as a boy in the clerical department of a big corporation and inside of ten years had bought on borrowed money the little Pontiac, which was the foundation of his fortune. His progress after that had been steady, although for a long time he had his bad moments owing to the unfriendly attitude of the banks, who had not then learned to appreciate his real ability. There are some even to-day who shake their heads mysteriously like suspicious old men, though the stock following the war jumped from forty-six to ninety-two on rumor of a melon-cutting. Lewis, incidentally, let a lot of it go at that figure and bought it in later on the big market slump at thirty-five. But that is neither here nor there. Fifty was par, and he declared his usual quarterly dividend of one dollar and twenty-five cents. The money, moreover, was earned—that and a great deal more.

YET the nearest Lewis had come to the inside of a mill in thirty years was to give a cursory glance at the blue-prints his engineers brought him when he built the big Pontiac. Every work morning he motored in a limousine from his country estate on Long Island to the office building in New York bearing his name, and there behind his heavy desk he sat until night, a big, silent, autocratic figure engaged in the single problem of adding another million to the several he already possessed. Except to himself there was nothing interesting about this, but there was about the method he employed.

Strictly speaking, Abner Lewis was not a manufacturer of woolen yarns; he was a manufacturer of men. Buildings, machinery, wool could be bought in the open market and then the process of spinning was more or less an automatic one. Yarns—good yarns—could be manufactured by the veriest tyro. The spinning frames and skilled labor looked after that. But whether those yarns produced a profit or sent their maker into the bankruptcy court was a question of management; and management was distinctly a question of men.

When Lewis started the little Pontiac, he took with him from the big firm, which had kept him for five years on a high stool checking up figures, three men: Beaupré a boss dyer; Judson, an overseer, and Harrington, superintendent of the prosperous Boyton mills. It cost him money—more, in proportion to his capital, than he could afford. He doubled their salaries and gave them five-year contracts. In return they took hold of his proposition as though it were their own.

They knew their business. Harrington and Beaupré had put over thirty years of their lives into mills; Judson, twenty. Not one of the three had, within this period, saved a cent. They were all tried and true salaried men, safely past that venturesome period when men strike out for themselves; an item Lewis took into account. The most they could hope for of the future was a larger salary. And that was a matter, in the case of Harrington, who would be fifty-five at the termination of his contract, entirely in the hands of Lewis; another item the latter had taken into account. Judson, of course, had Harrington's job to look forward to, while Beaupré would always be satisfied where he was.

Under the spur of his ten-thousand-dollar salary Harrington put himself, body and soul, into his work. He was at the mill early and late, looking after details and driving on Judson to continue where he left off. As a matter of fact, however, Judson needed no more spurring than Harrington. He noted the latter's graying hair—forgetting there were white streaks in his own over the temples—and prepared himself to step up when Harrington moved off.

And this game of follow your leader went on right down the line—until it finally reached a young fellow named Winchester, a quiet, earnest, bright-eyed chap whom Lewis happened to see one day as he rode up in the elevator. A few inquiries brought out the little there was to know about Winchester; that he was the son of a suburban insurance agent with a small business; that he had a high-school education; that he had been employed by the company in the clerical department two years, and that he seemed to thrive on hard work. All the odds and ends of extra jobs that every one else ducked were handed over to him, and uncomplainingly he cleaned them up. He was drawing a salary of fifteen dollars a week and living at home. That he had ambition was proved by the fact that he was taking a course in a night school.

This was just before Lewis bought his second mill, a bankrupt plant, with good water-power, down in Maine. He bid it in at auction for ten cents on the dollar and paid for it out of the surplus Harrington had earned for him. He appointed Judson agent and ordered him to offer Winchester an opportunity to go along as a sort of secretary on a five-dollar advance. Winchester jumped at the chance to get in touch with actual manufacturing, and left New York with the feeling that now he had his future in his own hands. He was not aware at this time that Lewis knew of his existence.

Winchester was not aware of this in the three or four years that followed, and yet in the semi-monthly visits Judson paid to the New York office, which always included a half-hour interview with the president, the latter managed indirectly to get an authoritative survey of the young man's progress. The interview covered others—some above Winchester, some below—so that he by no means stood out conspicuously as an object of especial inquiry.

HE DID not, as a matter of fact, occupy any particularly favorable position in the president's mind except as a good prospect. Lewis took no personal interest in him. He took no personal interest in any one connected with the company; or outside of it either, with the exception of his one child Adelaide—a fragile but not unattractive girl of twenty whom he kept in cloistered seclusion for fear of fortune-hunters. His employees were simply so many units of a money-making machine—a machine more delicate and sensitive than anything made of steel, however fine. Winchester was only one of many replacement parts in the making. If anything happened to him—if he died, for example—Lewis would forget him in twenty-four hours and shift his attention to some one else. Junked machinery does not remain very long as a memory, no matter how faithfully it may have served.

But to Winchester, in the meanwhile, the Pontiac corporation was becoming more and more personal. It was getting woven into him like a trade name. He had come into the small Maine town of Dunster, not as a citizen, but to work in the Pontiac mill. As a result, he participated but little in the town life.

He did not have much time anyway. At the conclusion of his routine work in the office he returned to his boarding-house for supper and then hurried back to the mills, which were now running on a night shift. This was not obligatory, but it gave him an opportunity to learn practical details. He went into the spinning-room and learned to spin; went into the dyeing-room and learned the art of dyeing; he even joined the engine-room force for a year in order to be prepared to handle emergencies there. He was quick,

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Howes appreciated the young man's efforts and turned over to him all the details of the mill end of the job.

intelligent and in earnest, so that in twelve months he was able to cover as much ground as the average indifferent apprentice does in five years. Before he was through he passed the State examinations and secured a first-class fireman's license.

He found this very useful once when the engineer got peeved and, after plugging up the water supply to the boiler, walked away and left the thing to explode. Winchester risked his life to prevent this little accident, and thereby probably saved Lewis fifty thousand dollars. A mill man never knows when any extra technical knowledge may prove serviceable. It is worth noting that the fifty thousand dollars was saved, not for himself, but for Lewis—and all as part of the day's work. Lewis heard of it and nodded with satisfaction. The boy was coming along.

Oddly enough, there was another member of the Lewis family who heard of it, and in rather a curious way. Adelaide had a French maid, and this French maid had a sweetheart working in the same mill with Winchester. It seems the latter had befriended Pierre in some fashion that left the lad, in true Gallic style, a devoted slave. Ned Winchester had called upon him to help in the boiler-room crisis, and Pierre had responded, though it involved his own safety. Adelaide happened upon Annette as the latter was reading and sobbing in happy relief over the adventure as described by Pierre—

Nom de Dieu! (he wrote). You should have seen Monsieur Winchester crawling in back of that boiler hunting for the cut-off with the steam all around him. It was like going into hell. As for me, waiting behind, I thought of you and kissed you good-by.

That Monsieur Winchester is, I tell you, a brave man. That he came back safe is only by the grace of the good God. And there are a hundred men who do not know it, out should get down on their knees and thank Monsieur Winchester that they are alive today. When you come to see me this summer, as you have promised, I shall permit you to shake the hand of Monsieur Winchester.

"It was terrible, was it not, how near to death my Pierre came?" sobbed Annette.

"Yes," murmured Adelaide. "And yet such things in life make one breathe faster."

She had dark eyes—sparkling eyes, though most of the time they were in sleepy disuse. At the moment they were brighter than usual. She had in her a romantic vein cultivated by much reading and dreaming—the only outlet she had for rather a quick imagination. An incident like this appealed to her.

"I am willing to do without such things and keep my breath," replied Annette. "I have told Pierre I do not like him to work in a mill."

"There are dangers everywhere for live men," answered Adelaide with a smile.

"If he could secure a position in an office——"

"LET him alone," cut in Adelaide. "Offices are for another kind of man."

She spoke with curious impulsiveness. When Annette glanced up in surprise, Mademoiselle Lewis turned away with an awkward laugh. All the men Adelaide met were men in offices—if they were in anything at all—and she was tired of them and their sleek, untroubled lives—as tired as she was at times of her own sleek, untroubled life. The name of Ned Winchester stuck in her mind, and at bored moments for weeks after this she often turned to the dramatic episode in which he figured. She would like to meet a man of that type once—a safe longing because an impossible one. Perhaps because of this she gave herself a little more leeway than usual in thinking of him. It amused her, now and again, to allow him to figure as the hero of some of her school-girl dreams.

Offhand one might think that dreams were about as safe toys as a young woman in her position could well play with. The danger lies in the tendency of dreams to materialize. One can never tell. Dreams seem never content to remain dreams. Like the ghosts of the spiritualists, they are ever seeking a more substantial expression than they find in their natural habitat of airy nothing. In their desperation they are sometimes not above resorting to stratagem.

It would be unfair to Adelaide Lewis, and an unjust reflection upon her maidenly instincts to maintain that she laid a deliberate plot to visit Dunster with the idea of meeting Ned Winchester. She did not. She took the adventurous journey quite unexpectedly. Annette's vacation was due in June and Adelaide had fully resigned herself to the necessity of looking dowdy for two weeks, as she always did when deprived of the help of the skilful fingers of this maid who had been with her ever since she went into long skirts. Dejectedly she was watching Annette pack when on the impulse of the moment she said:

"It would be nice if dad would let John drive you to Dunster."

Annette looked up. Her eyes were very keen at times.

"It would make a nice ride for ma'm'selle too, would it not?" she asked.

"For me?" exclaimed Adelaide.

Then her face flushed.

"It would take two days, but I could stop overnight in Boston with the Abbots. Then in Portland there are the Websters. It would be possible."

"If Mr. Lewis would consent—certainly."

The idea appealed to Annette strongly. To bowl over the road in the deep-seated limousine instead of being shut up in a dusty train was a proposition worth encouraging.

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"I will ask dad to-night," decided Adelaide.

Lewis was somewhat startled by the suggestion at first, but when he came to think it over he found no valid objections to offer. Neither the families of the Abbots nor the Websters contained any young male members.

"Very well," he agreed.

And that was all there was to it.

II

IT WAS on the road between Boston and Portland that Adelaide enlarged considerably the scope of her original plan. She had passed an agreeable enough night with the Abbots, but that had involved dressing for dinner, a theatre party and a final late supper. If she remained a night with the Websters, undoubtedly the same routine would be repeated—this time without the help of Annette. The program did not appeal to her in the slightest. She was tired of this sort of thing. She would much prefer to stop overnight in a quiet country village where not a soul knew her; where, for a little, she could feel just herself. This would be something of an adventure, and adventure was in the air.

Always before, when touring, she had been with her father, and that meant scarcely more than movement. She never on these trips got away from anything—not even New York, no matter how far she went. The road was simply a connecting link between hotels designed, as far as possible, to help New Yorkers forget they were away from home. Reservations were made ahead and the entire hotel staff notified that Abner Lewis and daughter were approaching. Lewis liked this sort of attention. It emphasized the distance he had traveled since he sat on a high stool checking up another man's figures.

Adelaide during the whole of the journey to Boston had placed Annette on the front seat beside John. That for a while gave her the effect of being alone, but it wore off. The next day she preferred to have Annette beside her because the girl was curiously excited. She had noticed it that morning when she did her hair.

"Your fingers are nervous," she had said to Annette.

"Because to-day I see Pierre," the latter answered without equivocation.

"I had almost forgotten about Pierre," confessed Adelaide.

"That is natural, ma'm'selle," responded Annette. "You have never seen him."

No, she had never seen him. And she had never seen Ned Winchester. The one reminded her of the other. As Annette, encouraged, ran on eagerly, off and on during the ride to Portland, about Pierre, Adelaide found her thoughts led off into such odd by-paths that sometimes she came to herself with a shock as genuine as anything Lewis himself might have experienced had he been able to follow her wandering. And though with a frown she forced her attention to the wonder of the beautiful coast-line as they passed through Hampton and Rye and York, she found herself again and again relapsing.

It was as they were approaching Portland that Adelaide with flushed cheeks announced her decision.

"I shall not stop here."

"But ma'm'selle—" began Annette, worried not only because of her charge but because of herself. After all, she was on a vacation.

"Listen, Annette," ran on Adelaide. "I am tired and I need rest for a few days. At Dunster I will telephone dad—if you will let me stay with you perhaps for only one night. No—you will not be my maid. You will be Miss Dejours and I—I will be Miss Jones. Let me pass as dad's secretary or cook or anything except Miss Lewis."

"Ma'm'selle!" exclaimed Annette in horror.

"I may not like it more than a day but—well, one day is something. Pierre found you a boarding-place, and I am sure he can find a room in the same house for me. I promise not to bother you."

Frankly, Annette did not approve of the idea, but—well, she had a big heart; a heart that at this time was a little bigger than ever. She had a notion, too, that if ma'm'selle really did telephone to Monsieur Lewis the project would immediately come to an abrupt end with plenty of time remaining for Miss Lewis to return to the Websters. So they passed through Portland and out into the open country again.

It was four o'clock when they reached Dunster, a small and unpretentious town with only one hotel, and that one supported mostly by the traveling men who were forced to stop overnight. Pierre had wisely enough secured accommodations for Annette at a little farm-house on the edge of the village proper, and here, after some inquiry, John landed them. As luck would have it, Mrs. Hodge did have another room, and this Miss Jones, as she introduced herself, immediately engaged, sending John back to the hotel to shift for himself.

"BUT you have not yet telephoned," Annette reminded her anxiously.

"There is time enough," answered Adelaide with a smile. "And remember from now on you are to forget me. You are to be your own mistress and I—I shall be my own maid."

To prove it Adelaide retired to her room and did her own hair and refused, five minutes afterward, to allow Annette to do it over again. It was while they were at supper that Pierre came, a short, stocky, clear-eyed son of France. Annette left the table to greet him and a moment later returned excitedly.

"*Ma foi*, he wishes to see you too—my friend Miss Jones. You see what it is not to tell the truth."

"But I shall be delighted to meet him," laughed Adelaide, rising at once from her tea.

That was well enough, but it seems that Pierre in his enthusiasm had brought with him a friend of his own—a Monsieur Ned Winchester, who was boarding at the very next farm-house. In another minute Adelaide was shaking hands with this tall, slim young fellow with the serious, eager face of a student and the honest handclasp of a man to be trusted—shaking hands with him and returning his frank look of pleased interest.

These first meetings may mean much or little. Sometimes—more often than not—they extend no further than the perfunctory touch of fingers; the connection of dead wires. At other times that touch completes a circuit and the wires become instantly alive.

There was evidence of Adelaide's response in her appearance; in the gipsy light of her black eyes; in the flush of color that spread over her cheeks; even in her timid smile with a touch of coquetry in it. She was ready at once to like this man quite as well as the hero of many of her recent dreams. She had, moreover, an instant feeling—and with it a sense of power that made her tingle—that he was quite ready to like her. The fact that she had been introduced as Miss Jones gave her a sense of security that permitted her emotions free play, although against that she did not like the idea of deceiving him, even though it might be for only a few hours.

"I have heard of you through Annette, Mr. Winchester," she said.

Winchester looked surprised. It never occurred to him that any one outside his immediate family ever heard of him. But though mystified, he was glad. To have been in any way in the consciousness of this dainty little woman he felt to be a compliment. The fragile, exquisite type of beauty appealed to him, as it so often does to strong men whose lives have forced them into daily touch with the coarser aspects of mill work. Just what her station in life was he did not know. He did not care. Annette he knew, of course, to be a maid in the Lewis household. He had come here to meet her to please impulsive Pierre, not knowing she had a companion. The latter might be a sort of secretary. It did not matter.

"Pierre wrote Annette how you crawled through the steam to save the boiler," she went on, in spite of frantic signaling from Annette.

"Oh, that," exclaimed Winchester, turning with a frown to challenge Pierre.

But the latter was disappearing into the next room, with Annette urging him on. This situation had become too complicated for them both.

"These Frenchmen are sometimes too dramatic," he explained uncomfortably. "But Pierre is a mighty good fellow and full of grit."

He glanced toward the door.

"I never knew him to run before," he smiled.

"I think Annette must be blamed for that," she laughed.

AND then in a few seconds they found themselves forgetting all about Annette and Pierre. Seated in the front room, each seemed eager to learn as much as possible about the other before, for all they knew, their paths might separate forever. She had, of course, the advantage because of what she knew about him and herself, but she was not sure how long she could hold it. He pressed her hard in an endeavor to place her, and she disliked being evasive. But, on the other hand, she felt that if she told the whole truth the episode would end abruptly. And she did not want it to end. So she told him merely that she was a member of Mr. Lewis's household and had taken advantage of Annette's visit to ride down with her.

"You will be here for a few days, then?" he asked.

"A few days?" she exclaimed. "Why, I—"

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There was evidence of Adelaide's response in the gipsy light of her black eyes; in the flush of color in her cheeks; even in her smile with a touch of coquetry in it.

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She rose.

"I—I must telephone New York tonight. I may have to leave in the morning."

Mrs. Hodge had no telephone, but Winchester offered to escort her to a neighboring house where she would find one. So, throwing a light shawl over her shoulders, she informed Annette and went out with him.

It was a clear, mild evening. The air was fragrant with blossoms and the sky brilliant with stars.

What constitutes an adventure is, like most everything else in life, solely a matter of relative values. To one it involves nothing less than plunging into the heart of Africa; to another it may mean nothing more than moving from one room into another; to one it may mean seeking the mountain-tops; to another, descending to the valley. A good deal depends upon what one gets out of the change.

To Adelaide Lewis this walk of a few hundred yards along a country road alone in the starlight by the side of this tall, alert young man, who at least once that she knew of had stood face to face with death without quavering, was the biggest adventure so far of her sheltered life. Not that, in the least, she was inclined to be sentimental. But it is something to venture forth for the first time alone along a road that, even with all the chances against one, still has within it all the innumerable possibilities that come with free will. At any rate the stars danced for her, and she walked with every nerve a-tingle.

Winchester left her alone in the room with the telephone, and after some difficulty she secured her connection. Lewis was surprised enough to learn of her whereabouts and still more surprised at her suggestion that she remain a day or two in order to rest before the journey back. However, he had no valid objection to offer, particularly where her health was involved. He had always been extremely solicitous about that.

"If you need anything, call on Judson at the mill. I'll phone him," he concluded.

"Yes, dad. Only please don't phone him because—he'd only bother me."

"Well, he's there if you want him. What's your number?"

She gave it.

"Call for Annette and she'll get me. But I shall be quite all right."

She returned to Winchester.

"Mr. Lewis has kindly given me a vacation for a few days," she said.

III

IN THE last few years Winchester had lost sight of the fact that there was anything else in life worth more than casual attention except the manufacture of Pontiac yarns. Spurred on by Judson, who in turn was spurred on by Lewis, he had come to accept this as the proper mental attitude of a Pontiac man. It was the standard he attempted to establish among those for whom he himself was responsible. These men, in their turn, attempted with less success to imbue the spinners with this same spirit. It made for maximum production at minimum cost.

Winchester had never tried to analyze just what this spirit was supposed to be based upon. The word Pontiac came to be a sort of fetish—like the word Dixie to Southerners. He did not associate it particularly with Lewis—certainly not with the latter's bank account; he did not associate it with the other stockholders. He did not associate it very intimately with his own personal fortunes. He had received a few small raises in salary during the period he had lived in Dunster, and he expected in the course of time to be advanced to the bigger positions; but it is doubtful if this accounted for the tremendous amount of energy he put into his job—the complete absorption with which he threw himself into his tasks.

Yet as day after day passed he found himself becoming more and more a fixed part of the organization of which this mill was one unit. Perhaps habit had something to do with it, although many higher qualities were involved. Loyalty was one of them. Once or twice opportunities to join other organizations had come to him, but even to consider these made him feel like a traitor. He was a Pontiac man as he was an American, and to change would have been to betray his colors.

IN ALL his service with the company it is doubtful if Winchester ever spent as much time and thought on outside matters as he did in the two or three days that Miss Adelaide Jones (*née* Lewis) passed in the town of Dunster. From his first meeting with her he began to sense new values. She flashed into his life like some radiant comet holding for the time being his entire attention, revealing to him undreamt-of new worlds. He tried to be sane about it. When he walked home alone after leaving her that first evening at the house and found himself staring excitedly at the very stars he had always taken for granted, he pulled himself up short with the exclamation,

"Don't make an ass of yourself."

He did not propose to make an ass of himself. He intended to keep steady. The probabilities were that this was only a passing episode. It was not likely that he was one to make much of an appeal to so fine and choice a creature as she. She would return to New York with a pleasantly reminiscent smile in her languid dark eyes—and forget. He would return to the grind of his routine duties and—perhaps not forget as quickly.

He certainly broke his habit when, upon awaking the next morning, he thought of her instead of the work before him. He had dared ask her if she would not enjoy a canoe on the lake in the late afternoon, and she had consented to come. The day broke fine and clear, and that was what it meant for him. From that point until four the hours dragged instead of flashing by, as they usually did. He left the mill early and hurried to his room, where he dressed with some care—a matter that ordinarily concerned him little. He found her waiting for him, much rested after a day which she confessed she had passed in bed.

So, after a short walk, they slid out on to the waters that had been dammed for the sole purpose of supplying power to the Pontiac, but which incidentally mirrored a blue sky and reflected a rim of stalwart pine-trees against a background of mountains. Settled among cushions facing him, she had an opportunity to study him, although this involved something of a conflict of interests; for he at the same time was trying to study her as he paddled the small craft noiselessly away from the mill and toward the clean hills. Often their eyes met, and then they smiled. This encouraged him after a little to speak more boldly.

"It's curious," he said, "that knowing ourselves so well we should be such mysteries to each other."

"But I wonder if we really do know ourselves," she mused.

"Better than any one else, at any rate." he answered. "I should like to swap my life against yours."

She started at that.

"You're going to be here such a little while," he pleaded as an excuse.

"I sha'n't promise, but—you may begin," she said.

So as he paddled on, farther and farther away from the dam, he sketched for her the rough outlines of his life.

"It isn't very dramatic, is it?" he concluded. "But it hasn't been dull. Only—do you know I've never been as far up this lake as we are now? Yet it's been here waiting for me all this while—with its colors and magic. You make me feel as though I'd missed a lot—unnecessarily."

"I guess every one misses a lot," she answered.

"You don't have these opportunities in New York, but you have others."

It was her turn to talk, and he had given her the cue. But the task was more difficult for her than for him. Yet she tried, and though she found it necessary to avoid a great many facts, he seemed to get something from her meager narrative. It was a curious thing to attempt anyway, and she found herself pausing often in bewildered surprise that he had persuaded her to it.

THEY were near the head of the pond by then—a hushed region of velvet beauties. Idly, as they passed them, he had plucked water-lilies and tossed them to her until her lap was filled. She made a winsome picture—like a verse from Tennyson. He had stopped and was leaning across his paddle.

"I am not going to let you out of my life again," he said tensely.

"We can always remember this hour, at any rate," she replied uneasily.

"And this—this is enough for you?" he demanded.

"Perhaps it's as well not to look ahead."

"But I shall—even if I have to make it a long way ahead," he answered.

"That is sometimes dangerous."

She realized now that she had allowed herself to drift—too far. And yet she thrilled with the joy of it—just because it was too far. Only now she was not considering herself alone. She must have a care for him.

"I think we'd better turn back," she said.

He swung the canoe instantly, and slowly they retraced their path; but it did not seem like turning back. It was as though they were merely going on and on.

In her room that night Adelaide Lewis, reviewing the day's events, knew that to-morrow morning was the time for flight if she wished to end this episode—knew it positively. She had known it even before he left, when he had seized her hand and pleaded with her to remain one more

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Lewis lurched forward as if about to strike, but checked himself before the unflinching eyes of youth.

evening. How her heart had started at the firm, warm grip of his fingers! It had not yet quieted down to normal. She felt as though it never would; that she would always find herself a little breathless and with crimsoned cheeks.

Still there was time to escape if she wished. A note to him—such a note as she knew well how to write—revealing her identity, and a summons to John before breakfast to call for her, and she would be on the way home to her moated castle, safe from any further intrusion. She would always have this hour or two of freedom to remember—this brief flight into the azure toward the golden sun. And what a vision, even in a few moments, this had revealed to her, and how confident she had felt with this man beside her!

She had no doubts about Ned Winchester then; she had none now. As a reality he fitted into her life as perfectly as he had in her dreams. Her instincts were sure. If any one could ever fulfill her desires, the deeper desires of her young womanhood, it was he. She would have been ready to step out of the house this minute and follow wherever he might lead had she only herself to consider. But there was her father and his desires. What he planned for her only he knew, but certainly it was not this. She shuddered at the thought. The fires in her heart died down. Annette rapped at the door anxious to do her hair for the night.

"No, dear," she answered. "I will do it myself, thank you."

"Ma'm'selle has not caught a cold?"

"No—not a cold," replied ma'm'selle.

Yet she shivered a little as she spoke.

She did not go home the next day, and everything happened just as she feared—with a joyous thrill. She found herself in the arms of Ned Winchester in the shadows of the porch of the old farm-house. And he was kissing her hair and trying to calm her.

"I'm going to work harder than ever, little girl," he was saying. "And some day I'll earn enough money to justify my coming to get you. In the meanwhile——"

"Oh," she sobbed, "what shall I do in the meanwhile?"

"You must write me every day," he answered.

IV

WHEN Lewis bought, out of his earnings, the group of three mills belonging to the Stimson estate, Harrington expected to be advanced to general manager and Judson expected to move up to the big Pontiac, which would leave Winchester the logical selection for agent of the Dunster mills. But instead of carrying out this program, Lewis kept every one where he was and appointed Howes, from the Stimson properties, general agent. He had his reasons.

The Harrington and Judson salary contracts had another year to run. Harrington was getting old, and if made general agent would, at the termination of his present contract, expect a larger salary, while Howes, who had been drawing only five thousand, was well satisfied with an advance of two thousand. If Harrington rebelled at the arrangement, this would leave his job open to Judson, who would be satisfied to start with six. Lewis could then move Winchester up to Judson's place with a thousand-dollar advance. The result of this shuffle would save some ten thousand dollars in salaries and leave every one but Harrington, who had outlived his usefulness, feeling he had made a step forward. It was as simple as that. Moreover, it was a good plan to do the unexpected every now and then. It left every one feeling insecure.

Howes looked like a good man. He was not over forty and a driver. In less than three months both Harrington and Judson felt his power. He knew the Stimson mills and he wanted to know equally well the big and little Pontiac, so he spent a good deal of time in them. It was at the latter that he ran across Winchester. He liked the young fellow and seemed to rely more upon him than Judson to carry out his new policies—policies a bit too radical for Judson's taste; policies, if the truth were known, a little too radical for the taste of Lewis. For a few months the latter kept his hands off, but when Howes proposed a general wage increase to offset a threatened strike, Lewis gripped his stubborn jaws.

"We'll wait until they do strike," he decided.

"They'll strike and they'll get what they ask for. Isn't it better to give it to them now than to be forced?" argued Howes.

"It's part of your job to keep them from striking," suggested Lewis.

Howes said nothing, but he went out white-cheeked at the rebuff. He was young and he had not had the benefit of Pontiac training in discipline. Lewis meant, if possible, to remedy the deficiency, but in the meanwhile he made another strategic move. He brought Winchester into the general office as assistant to Howes. He had several objects; to remind the latter that some one was treading on his heels; to get a better line himself on the young man; and to have some one who could report to him in detail just what Howes's activities consisted of. On this move he advanced Winchester five hundred dollars, which made twenty-five hundred he was now drawing.

Winchester was delighted because it brought him back to New York. And yet almost at once he ran into a puzzling situation. After his interview with Lewis he had telephoned Adelaide the good news and she had appeared more frightened than pleased. He had asked her to come out to dinner with him that evening, before he returned to Dunster to pack, but she had refused.

"I can't, Ned. Oh, I can't."

"Then let me come down to the house now."

"No. No. NO!" she pleaded. "I'll write

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you. I'll explain everything. Only——"

With that she rang off. He tried to reach her again and Annette answered.

"She begs of you not to call the house," said Annette.

"It's darned strange."

"Yes, but monsieur must trust a little. Ma'm'selle asks me to beg of you to await her letter."

Winchester received the letter the day after his return. It took away his breath. She confessed her deceit quite simply—

At the beginning, the fib did not seem of much consequence. I wanted to be just myself for a little and not the daughter of the president of the Pontiac corporation. Then everything happened so swiftly, Ned, that I could not think. Since then I have tried a dozen times to tell you the truth, but I've been afraid. I did not want to run the risk of losing myself and losing you. And dad—well, dad is dad. He does not understand very well. That is why I could not let you come down to the house. And yet, as I have told you, my aching heart is all yours. A.

Winchester packed his trunk in a daze. What a fool he had been—what a country simpleton! But as he stopped and read the letter again a grimmer look came into his face. Dad was dad, she had said, which meant that Lewis was Lewis. Well, what of it? Wasn't he Winchester and she—was still she. The development made his twenty-five hundred look small enough; but if he hung on—there was the general managership ahead of him, said to be worth ten thousand a year. With such a salary he might venture to confront even Lewis.

V

ADELAIDE LEWIS and Winchester kept their secret close. They found opportunities to meet occasionally, and when that was not possible the telephone remained. In the meanwhile he worked harder on his new position than ever he had before. Howes, instead of resenting his efforts, appreciated them and turned over to him all the details of the mill end of the job, confining himself to the executive work. He liked Winchester and his clean-cut way of seeing problems through to a solution, liked his intelligence, his experience and his resourcefulness. And though he did not know what his salary was, he did not believe it was enough. One day he put the question bluntly to Winchester.

"What you getting, Ned?" he asked.

"Twenty-five hundred," answered Winchester without embarrassment.

"It isn't enough. I'll see what I can do for you."

It was a mistake, but his impulse was right. Lewis sat on him hard.

"I'm looking after the salaries," he informed Howes. "Get that fixed in your head once for all."

Howes got that fixed all right, and one or two other things. He knew what he was doing and he knew what Winchester was doing and that their combined efforts were netting a return to Lewis of around one thousand per cent. In looking at his work this way he again showed the lack of Pontiac training. He was getting it fast, to be sure, in the daily slights Lewis seemed to enjoy inflicting upon him with the idea of fitting him into his place. Lewis himself wondered, and fell into the habit of calling young Winchester into his office more and more frequently for confidential chats. This personal contact with the president gave Winchester a new sense of his responsibility to the company.

Lewis had judged to a nicety just when this new sense would be needed. He had heard rumors of what Howes was about, but to Winchester the proposal of Howes came as a complete surprise. Howes invited him out to dinner one day in April and sprung it over the soup.

"Ned," he said, "I've got something to tell you in confidence; I'm planning to get out of the Pontiac."

"You?" exclaimed Winchester. "But the company can't get along without you."

"Don't let that worry you," snapped Howes. "Lewis isn't the kind to allow any man to be as valuable to him as that. I'm getting out while I'm young enough to make it possible. I've scraped together enough capital to buy a mill of my own, and what I've been earning for him I'm going to earn for myself."

He paused a moment.

"I'd like to have you come with me."

"Me?"

"With an interest in the business."

"THAT'S white of you," exclaimed Winchester. "But——"

"Forget the 'buts,'" broke in Howes. "Of course there's an element of risk in it, but you aren't as old as I am by ten years. We'll start in a small way, but with what we know of this business it's a good gamble. Anyhow, win or lose, it will be a man's game."

Howes went into details. He had an option on a good mill property and capital enough raised to equip it. He proposed to give Winchester a one-third interest to be paid for out of profits.

"It's a chance to stand on your own feet," concluded Howes. "Think it over and let me know in a couple of days."

"But what about Mr. Lewis?" exclaimed Winchester.

"A two weeks' notice is all that he requires. Mine went in to-day."

Winchester passed a sleepless night. The proposition looked good—extraordinarily good. It was an opportunity that comes to a man but once in a lifetime. If a success, it meant financial independence. It meant Adelaide and all she stood for. But against that was his obligation to Lewis—his loyalty as a Pontiac man. All night he looked at the problem from every possible angle, but when dawn came it was still unsolved. He went to the office pale and troubled and Howes greeted him with a cheery "Good morning" without reference to the conference. An hour later Lewis summoned him.

The big man sat back in his big chair with a letter in his chubby fingers; cool, confident, serene. To have anticipated this very situation and to have prepared for it as neatly as he had done gave him a sense of satisfaction. That was real generalship—the kind that those who wondered how Lewis made his fortune did not appreciate.

"Mr. Howes," he began, "has resigned."

"Yes, sir," nodded Winchester.

"You knew of his intention?" snapped Lewis in surprise.

"Only last night."

"He has been talking with you, then?"

"We had dinner together last night."

"I had anticipated his action for some time," mused Lewis. "That is why I put you in as his assistant. I feel that you are competent to carry on the work."

He paused a moment. He had fixed on five thousand as the proper salary, but something in the young man's attitude made him change.

"You are general manager from to-day on a salary of ten thousand," he announced.

Ten thousand dollars a year! The words rang through Winchester's head like a pæan of victory.

Lewis took advantage of the moment.

"You accept?" he demanded quickly.

Ten thousand dollars a year—four times what he was drawing now! And he and Adelaide had estimated that they could get along on five!

"Yes," answered Winchester.

Lewis smiled. He drew from one corner of his desk a paper. It was a five-year contract. He pointed to a line at the bottom of the sheet and offered Winchester his gold fountain pen.

"Sign here," he said.

As Winchester obeyed, Lewis rubbed his fat hands together. With the boy tied up on a salary for the best five years of his life, he need not worry any more about him. He had his strangle-hold.

Winchester returned the pen and stood up. What he did next he did on the spur of the moment. It was as though he grew from a boy to a man in a second.

"Mr. Lewis," he said steadily, "I didn't expect this advance, but now that it has come it makes a difference about—about some other things in my life. It makes it possible for me to marry."

"Well possible, on that salary," nodded Lewis benignly.

"THEN I see no reason why I shouldn't ask you for your daughter's hand."

"You—what?" roared Lewis.

"I met her a year ago. I have only been waiting——"

Lewis sprang from his chair. Winchester did not flinch.

"We met at Dunster," he explained. "I did not know she was your daughter at first, and later that did not seem to make any difference. I have been waiting to tell you until I had the right."

"Right! What right have you now?" stormed Lewis.

"The right of her love; the right of being able to support her properly."

"It has gone as far as that?" choked Lewis.

"Yes, sir. As far as that," answered Winchester.

Lewis tottered back. Then he lurched forward as though about to strike. But he checked himself in time—checked himself before the unflinching eyes of youth. Then he squared his shoulders and stood so for a moment. Then his chubby hand went up to his throat. He felt as though some one had gripped him—gripped him tight with a hold that would never loosen.

When Howes a little later wormed the truth out of Winchester, he looked perplexed for a moment. Then he exclaimed:

"So he got you! No, by George, you got him! No, the girl got you both! Hang it all, I've lost a darned good man anyhow. It beats the deuce how petticoats can complicate business."

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"There, sir. Now it shows. And won't we be proud of you just, in khaki and all!"

If Winter Comes

By A. S. M. Hutchinson

Author of "Once Aboard the Lugger," "The Happy Warrior," etc.

VI

THE STORY

IN THE year 1912, Mark Sabre, at the age of thirty-four, is living with his wife, Mabel, in the English country town of Penny Green, suburb of Tidborough. In business Sabre is associated with the long-established Tidborough house of Fortune, East & Sabre, ecclesiastical and scholastic furnishers and designers. That part of his work to which Sabre brings special enthusiasm is the publication of educational text-books. His projected masterpiece is to be known as just "England," or "Sabre's England."

Mabel's fondness for gossip and the exclusive society of social equals, her practicality and her lack of imagination sometimes irritate Mark. She is indifferent to his taste for books, his constant groping for light on the odd business of life, his commonplace friends, and his occasional sallies of humorous comment.

One morning as Sabre is bicycling toward Tidborough he stops to exchange greetings with Lord and Lady Tybar, recently returned after two years' absence abroad. Lady Tybar, who before her marriage had been Nona Holiday, was an old friend of Sabre's.

On reaching the office Mark learns that his junior business associate, Twyning, has been taken into partnership by the Reverend Sebastian Fortune, senior member of the firm. Mark, mindful of Fortune's similar promise to him, asks the elder man for an explanation, but fails to get a satisfactory one. On the same day he arrives home in time to receive a note from Nona Tybar inviting him to call.

Mabel reads Nona's letter and by her comments on the familiar tone of it, starts a disagreeable discussion that reveals her jealous suspicions. Mark's patience is further strained by the mannerisms and positive opinions of her luncheon guest, the Reverend Mr. Boom Bagshaw.

A few days later Nona Tybar comes to see Sabre at his office, where she inspects his work with a friendly interest. Her visit is terminated by the arrival of Lord Tybar, who greets both with facetious mockery. Sabre begins dimly to realize that the bantering tone habitually used between the Tybars is a shield concealing some unhappiness.

At his next meeting with Nona, an accidental one, she tells him that her marriage with Tybar, who, for all his captivating charm, is utterly without conscience or a scrap of moral principle, was a mistake—that she should have chosen him, Mark.

One morning at the office Sabre receives a visit from Fortune, who introduces Twyning's son as a new member of the staff. Then Mark reads a letter from Nona, asking him to take her away. War is declared the same day, and in the excitement Sabre receives a second letter announcing Nona's intention to stick by her husband, who has been commissioned. Sabre attempts to join a local regiment but is rejected because of a heart affection.

Young Perch, a neighbor of Sabre's who is about to enlist, asks Mark to find a companion for his widowed mother. Sabre recommends the daughter of a foreman at the Tidborough works, Effie Bright, who proves so suitable a choice that Perch leaves at once for the front. Fortune, together with Twyning, whose son has joined up, hint broadly that it is Sabre's turn and are chagrined when he tells them of his unsuccessful attempt to enlist.

Word comes of Lord Tybar's receipt of the Victoria Cross for conspicuous gallantry in action. Sabre again attempts to qualify for the ranks and is again refused. The news of Young Perch's death in France comes as a tremendous shock. Mark, relieving Effie for a night at the elderly woman's bedside, is present at her death. His unaccountable devotion to "those strange people" results in another quarrel with Mabel. Hearing of the new Derby enlistment plan, Sabre sets out once more for the nearest recruiting station.

Chapter Eight (*Continued*)

VII

AT CHOVENSBURY the recruiting station was in the elementary schools. Sabre entered a large room, filled with men in various stages of dressing, odorous of humanity, very noisy. It was a roughish collection: the men mostly of the laboring or artisan classes. At a table in the center two soldiers with lance-corporal's stripes were filling up blue forms with the answers to questions barked out at the file of men who shuffled before them. As each form was completed it was pushed at the man interrogated with, "Get undressed."

Sabre took his place in the chain. In one corner of the room a doctor in uniform was testing eyesight. Passed on from there, each recruit joined a group wearing only greatcoat or shirt and standing about a stove near the door. At intervals the door opened and three nude men, coat or shirt in hand, entered, and a sergeant bawled, "Next three!"

Sabre was presently one of the three. Of the two who companioned him one was an undersized little individual wearing a truss, the other appeared to be wearing a suit of deep-brown tights out [illegible] neck and red hands

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thrust conspicuously. Sabre realized with a slight shock that the brown suit was the grime of the unbathed. Across the passage another room was entered. The recruits dropped their final covering and were directed: one to two sergeants who operated weights, a height gage and a measuring-tape; another to an officer who said, "Stand on one leg. Bend your toes. Now on the other. Toes. Stretch out your arms. Work your fingers. Squat on your heels." The third recruit went to an officer who dabbed chests with a stethoscope and said, "Had any illnesses?" When the recruit had passed through each performance he walked to two officers seated with enrolment forms at a table, was spoken to, and then recovered his discarded garment and walked out. The whole business took about a minute and a half. They were certainly whizzing them through.

Sabre came last to the officer with the stethoscope. He was just polishing off the undersized little man with the truss. "Take that thing off. Cough. How long have you had this? Go along." He turned to Sabre, dabbed perfunctorily at his lungs, then at his heart. "Wait a minute." He applied his ear to the stethoscope again. Then he looked up at Sabre's face. "Had any illnesses?" "Not one in my life." "Shortness of breath?" "Not the least. I was in the XV at school." Sabre's voice was tremulous with eagerness. The doctor's eyes appeared to exchange a message with him. They gave the slightest twinkle. "Go along."

He went to the table where sat the two officers with the paper forms. "Name?" "Sabre." The officer nearer him drew a form toward him and poised a fountain pen over it. Sabre felt it extraordinarily odd to be standing stark naked before two men fully dressed. In his rejection at Tidborough this had not happened.

"Any complaints?"

Sabre was surprised at such consideration. He thought the reference was to his treatment during examination. "No."

The officer, who appeared to be short-tempered, looked quickly at him. "Absolutely nothing wrong with you?"

"Oh, I thought you meant——"

The officer *was* short-tempered. "Never mind what you *thought*. You hear what I'm asking you, don't you?"

It was his first experience of a manner with which he was to become more familiar. "Sorry. No, nothing whatever."

The fountain pen made a note. "Get off."

He could have shouted aloud. He thought, "By God!"

In the dressing-room a sergeant bawled, "All recruits!"—paused and glared about the room and drew breath for further discharge. This mannerism Sabre was also to become accustomed to: in the Army, always "the cautionary word" first when an order was given. The sergeant then discharged: "All recruits past the doctor proceed to the room under this for swearing in. When sworn, to office adjoining for pay, card and armlet. And get a move on with it!"

VIII

THE most stupendously elated man in all England was presently riding to Penny Green on Sabre's bicycle. On his arm blazed the khaki brassard, in the breast-pocket of his waistcoat, specially cleared to give private accommodation to so glorious a prize, were a half-crown and two pennies, the most thrillingly magnificent sum he had ever earned—his army pay. His singing thought was: "I'm in the Army! I'm in the Army! I don't care for anything now. By Gad, I can't believe it. I'm in the war at last!" His terrific thought was, "Good luck have thee with thine honor; ride on . . . and thy right hand shall show thee terrible things."

He burst into the house and discharged the torrent of his elation on to Mabel. "I say, I'm in the Army! They've passed me! Look here! Look at my Derby armlet! And look at this. That's my pay! Just look, Mabel—two and eightpence."

He extended the coins to her in his hand. "Look!"

She gave her sudden burst of laughter. "How perfectly ridiculous! Two and eightpence! Why ever did you take it?"

"Take it? Why, it's my pay! My army pay! I've never been so proud of anything in my life. I'll keep these coins forever. Where shall I put them?" He looked around for a shrine worthy enough. "No, I can't put them anywhere yet. I want to keep looking at them. I say, you're glad I'm in, aren't you? Do say something."

She gave her laugh. "But you're not in. You do get so fearfully excited. After all, it's only this Lord Derby thing where they call the men up in age classes, the papers say. Yours can't come for months. You may not go at all."

HE DROPPED the coins slowly into his pocket—chink! chink! chink! "Oh, well, if that's all you've got to say about it——"

"Well, what do you expect? You just come rushing in and telling me without ever having said a word that you were going. And for that matter, you seem to forget the extraordinary way in which you went off this morning. I haven't."

"I had forgotten it. I was upset. I went off, I know; but I don't remember——"

"No, you only swore at me; that's all."

"Mabel, I'm sure I didn't."

"You bawled out 'For God's sake.' I call that swearing. I don't mind. It's not particularly nice for the servants to hear, but I'm not saying anything about that."

His brows were puckered up. "What is it you are saying?"

"I'm simply saying that, behaving like that, it's not quite fair to pretend that I'm not enthusiastic enough for you about this Lord Derby thing. It isn't as if you were really in the Army——"

He wished not to speak, but he could not let this go. "But I *am* in."

"Yes, but not properly in—yet. And perhaps you won't ever be. It doesn't seem like being 'in' to me. That's all I'm saying. Surely there's no harm in that!"

He was at the window staring out into the garden. "No, there's no *harm* in it."

"Well, then, what are we arguing about it for?"

He turned toward her. "Well, but do understand, Mabel. If you think I was a fool rushing in like that, as you call it—do understand—it's a Government scheme. It's binding. It isn't a joke."

"No, but I think they make it a joke, and I can't think why you can't see the funny side of it. I think giving you two and tuppence like that—a man in your position—is too lovely for words."

He took the coins from his pocket and jerked them on the table before her. "Here, pay the butcher with it."

IX

BUT as he reached the door, his face working, the tremendous and magnificent thought struck into his realization again. "I'm in the Army! By Gad, I'm in the Army. I don't care what happens now!" He strode back, smiling, and took up the money. "No, I'm dashed if I can let it go!" He went out jingling it and turned into the kitchen. "I say, High, Low, I'm in the Army! I've got in. I'll be off soon. Look at my badge!"

They chorused: "Well, there now!"

He said delightedly: "Pretty good, eh? Isn't it fine! Look at this—that's my pay. Two and eightpence!"

The chorus: "Oh, if ever!"

High Jinks said: "That armlet, sir, that's too loose. It don't half show down on your elbow, sir. You want it up here."

"Yes, that's the place. Won't it stay?"

"I'll put a safety-pin in, sir; and then to-night shift the buttons. That's what it wants."

"Yes, do, High. That's fine."

He held out his arm and the two girls pinned to advantage the splendid sign of his splendid triumph.

"There, sir. Now it shows. And won't we be proud of you just, in khaki and all!"

He laughed delightedly. "I'm jolly proud of myself, I tell you! Now then, Thumbs, I don't want bayonets in me yet!"

Glorious! Glorious! And what would not Nona say!

Chapter Nine

Sabre Goes to War

LIFE, when it takes so giant a hand in its puppet-show as to upturn a caldron of world war upon the puppets, may be imagined biting its fingers in some chagrin at the little result in particular instances. As vegetation beneath snow, so individual development beneath universal calamity. Nature persists; individual life persists. The snow melts, the calamity passes; the green things spring again, the individual lives are but approached more nearly to their several destinations.

Sabre was called up in his Derby class within eight weeks of his enrolment—at the end of February, 1916. He was nearly two years in the war; but his ultimate encounter with life awaited him, and was met, at Penny Green. It might have been reached precisely as it was reached without agency of the war, certainly without participation in it. Of the interval only those few events ultimately mattered which had connection with his life at home. They seemed in the night of the war transient as falling stars; they proved themselves lodestars of his destiny. They seemed nothing, yet even as they flashed and passed he occupied himself with them as the falling star catches the attention from all the constellations fixed and constant. They were of his own life; the war life was life in exile.

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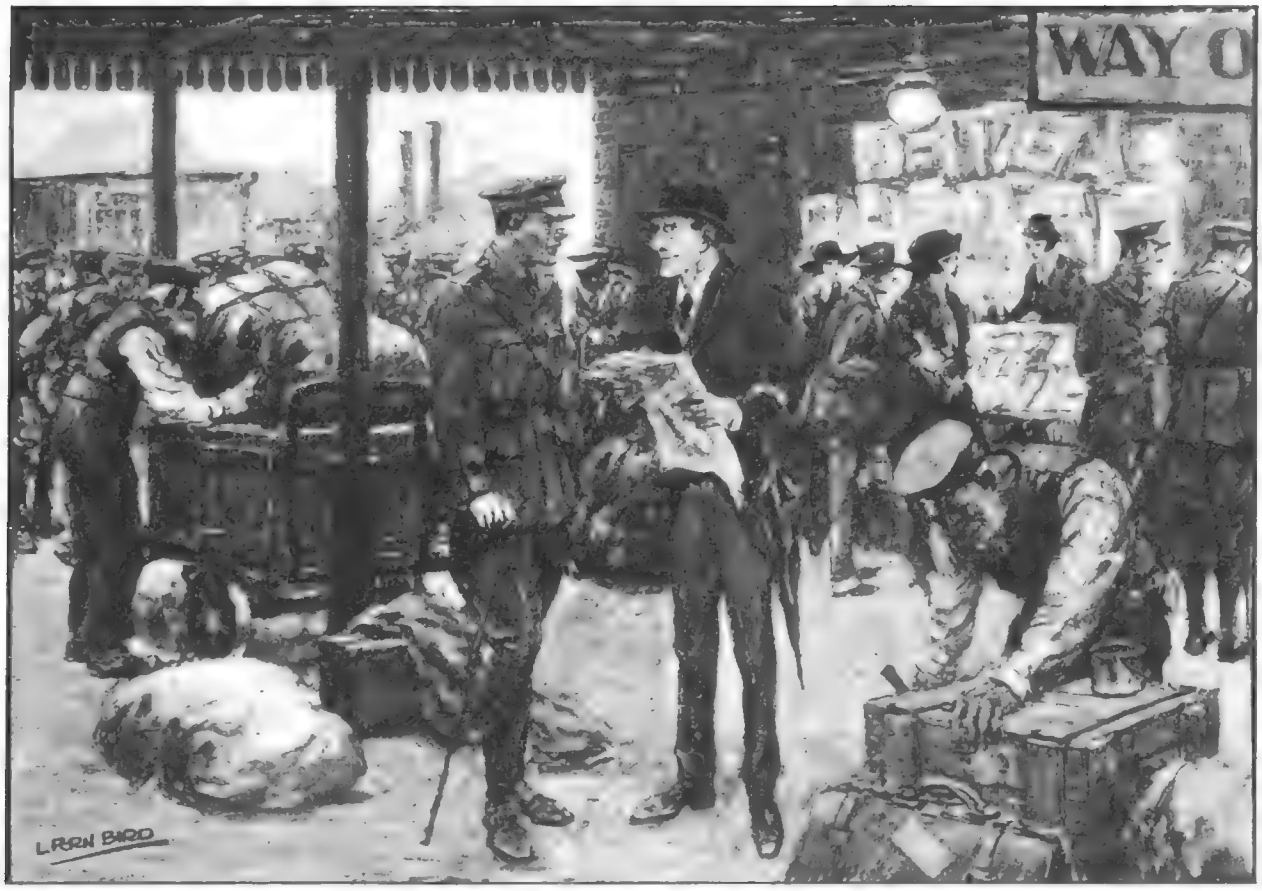

"I say, old man," said Twyning, "Old Bright's very upset about Effie getting the sack from your place like that. How was it?"

And, caught up at last in the enormous machinery of the war, his feelings toward the war underwent a great change. First in the training camp in Dorsetshire, afterward, and much more so, in the trenches in Flanders, it was only by a deliberate effort that he would recapture, now and then, the old tremendous emotions in the thought of England challenged and beset. He turned to it as stimulant in moments of depression and of dismay, in hours of intense and miserable loathing of some conditions of his early life in the ranks, and later, in hours when fatigue and bodily discomfort reached degrees he had not believed it possible to endure—and go on with. He turned to it as stimulant and it never failed of its stimulation. "I'm in it. What *does* this matter? This is the war. It's the war. Those infernal devils. If these frightful things were being done in England! Imagine if this was in England! Thank God I'm in it. There you are! I'm absolutely all right when I remember why I'm here." And enormous exaltation of spirit would lift away the loneliness, remove the loathing, banish the exhaustion, dissipate the fear. The fear. "And thy right hand shall show thee terrible things."

He was more often than once in situations in which he knew he was afraid and held fear away only because, with his old habit of introspection he knew it for fear—a horrible thing that sought mastery of him and by sheer force of mental detachment must be held away where it could be looked at and known for the vile thing it was. In such ordeals, in Flanders, he got the habit of saying to himself between his teeth: "Six minutes, six hours, six days, six months, six years. Where the hell will I be?" It somehow helped. The six minutes would go, and one could believe that all the periods would go—and wonder where they would find one.

But more than that: now, caught up in the enormous machinery of the war, he never could accept it, as other men seemed to accept it, as normal and natural occupation that might be expected to go on forever and outside of which was nothing at all. His life was not here; it was at home. He got the feeling that this business in which he was caught up was a business apart altogether from his own individual life—a kind of trance in which his own life was held temporarily in abeyance, a kind of transmigration in which he occupied another and a very strange identity; from whose most strange personality, often so amazingly occupied, he looked wonderingly upon the identity that was his own, waiting his return.

And it was when, in thought or fleeting action, he came in touch with that old, waiting identity, that there happened the things that seemed transient as falling stars but moved into his horoscope as planets, and remained.

II

HE FIRST went to France, in one of the long string of service battalions that had sprung out of The Pinks, in the June following his enlistment. Mabel had not wished to make any change in her manner of life while he was still in England in training and she did not wish to when, at home three days on his draft leave, he discussed it with her. She much preferred, she said, to go on living in her own home. She was altogether against any idea of going to be with her father at Tidborough, and there was no cousin "or anybody like that" (her two sisters were married and had homes of their own) that she would care to have in the house with her. Relations were all very well in their right place. But sharing the house with you was not their right place. She had plenty to do with her war work and one thing and another; if, in the matter of obviating loneliness, she did make any change at all it might be to get some sort of paid companion; if you had any one permanently in the house it was much better to have some one in a dependent position, not as your equal, upsetting things.

The whole of these considerations were advanced again in a letter which Sabre received in July and which gave him great pleasure. Mabel had decided to get a paid companion—it was rather lonely in some ways—and she had arranged to have "that girl Miss Bright." Sabre, reading, exclaimed aloud: "By Jove that's good. I am glad." And he thought: "Jolly little Effie! That's splendid." He somehow liked immensely the idea of imagining Bright Effie about the house. He thought: "I wish she could have been in long ago, when I was there. It would have made a difference. Some one between us. We used to work on one another's nerves. That was our trouble. Pretty little Effie! How jolly it would have been! Like a jolly little sister."

He puckered his brows a little as he read on to Mabel's further reflections on the new enterprise. "Of course she's not our class, but she's quite ladylike, and on the whole I think it just as well not to have a lady. It might be very difficult sometimes to give orders to any one of one's own standing."

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He didn't quite like that; but after all it was only just Mabel's way of looking at things. It was the jolliest possible idea. He wrote back enthusiastically about it and always after Effie was installed inquired after her in his letters.

But Mabel did not reply to these inquiries.

III

HE WAS writing regularly to Nona and regularly hearing from her. He never could quite make out where she was, addressing her only to her symbol in the field post-office. She was car-driving and working very long hours. There was one letter that he never posted, but of the existence of which he permitted himself to tell her. "I carry it about with me always in my pay-book. It is addressed to you. If I ever get outed, it will go to you. In it I have said everything that I have never said to you, but that you know without my saying it. There'll be no harm in your hearing it from my own hand if I'm dead. I keep on adding to it. Every time we come back into rest I add a little more. It all could be said in the three words we have never said to one another. But all the words that I could ever write would never say them to you as I feel them. There! I must say no more of it. I ought not to have said so much."

And she wrote: "Marko, I can read your letter, every line of it. I lie awake, Marko, and imagine it to myself—word by word, line by line; and word by word, line by line, in the same words and in the same lines, I answer it. So when you read it to yourself for me, read it for yourself from me. Oh, Marko . . .

"That I ever shall have cause to read it in actual fact I pray God never to permit. But so many women are praying for so many men, and daily— So I am praying beyond that; for myself; for strength, if anything should happen to you, to turn my heart to God. You see, then I can say, 'God keep you—in any amazement.'"

IV

EARLY in December he wrote to Mabel: "A most extraordinary thing has happened. I'm coming home! I shall be with you almost on top of this. It's too astonishing. I've suddenly been told that I'm one of five men in the battalion who have been selected to go home to an officer cadet battalion for a commission. Don't jump to the conclusion that I'm the Pride of the Regiment or anything like that. It's simply due to two things: one that this is not the kind of battalion with many men who would think of taking commissions; the other that both my platoon officer and the captain of my company happen to be Old Tidburians and, as I've told you, have often been rather decent to me. So when this chance came along the rest was easy. I know you'll be glad. You've never liked the idea of my being in the ranks. But it's rather wonderful, isn't it? I hope to be home on the third and I go on to the Cadet battalion, at Cambridge, on the fifth."

Two days later he started, very high of spirit, for England. As he was leaving the village where the battalion was resting—his immediate program the adventure of "lorry-jumping" to the railhead—the mail came in and brought him a letter from Mabel. It had crossed his own and a paragraph in it somehow damped the tide of his spirits.

"I was very much annoyed with Miss Bright yesterday. I had been kept rather late at our Red Cross Supply Depot owing to an urgent call for accessories and when I came home I found that Miss Bright had actually taken what I consider the great liberty of ordering up tea without waiting for me. I considered it great presumption on her part and told her so. I find her taking liberties in many ways. It's always the way with that class—once you treat them kindly they turn on you. However, I have, I think, made it quite clear to her that she is not here for the purpose of giving her own orders and being treated like a princess."

It clouded his excitement. His thought was: "Damn it, I hope she isn't bullying Effie."

It clouded his excitement. He had the luck almost at once to jump a lorry that would lift him a long bit on his road, and the driver felicitated him with envious cheerfulness on being off for "leaf." He would have responded with immense heartiness before reading that letter. With Mabel's tart sentences in his mind a certain gloom, a rather vexed gloom, bestrode him. Her words presented her aspect and her attitude and her atmosphere with a reminiscent flavor that took the edge off his eagerness for home. On the road when the lorry had dropped him, on the interminable journey in the train, on the boat, the feeling remained with him. England—England!—merged into view across the water, and he was astonished, as his heart bounded for joy at Folkestone coming into sight, to realize from what depression of mind it bounded away. He was ashamed of himself and perturbed with himself that he had not more relished the journey; the journey that was the most glorious thing in the dreams of every man in France. He thought: "Well, what am I coming home to?"

The train went speeding through the English fields, dear, familiar, English lands, sodden and bare and unspeakably exquisite to him in their December mood. He gazed upon them, flooding all his heart out to them. He thought: "Why should there be anything to make me feel depressed? Why should things be the same as they used to be? But dash that letter! Dash it, I hope she's not been bullying that girl."

V

HE MADE rather a boisterous entry into the house on his arrival, arriving in the morning before breakfast. He entered the hall just after eight o'clock and announced himself with a loud "Hullo, everybody!" and thumped the butt of his rifle on the floor. An enormous crash in the kitchen and a shriek of "It's the master!" heralded the tumultuous discharge upon him of High Jinks and Low Jinks. Effie appeared from the dining-room. He was surrounded and enthusiastically shaking hands. "Hullo, you Jinkses! Isn't this ripping? By Jove, High—and Low—it's famous to see you again. Hullo, Effie! Just fancy you being here! How jolly fine, eh? High Jinks, I want the most enormous breakfast you've ever cooked. Got any kippers? Good girl. That's the stuff to give the troops. Where's the mistress? Not down yet? I'll go up. Low Jinks—Low Jinks, I'm dashed if you aren't crying! Well, it is jolly nice to see you again, Low. How's the old bike? Look here, Low, I want the most boiling bath——"

He broke off. "Hullo, Mabel! Hullo! Did you get my letter? I'm coming up."

Mabel was in a wrapper at the head of the stairs. He ran up. "I'm simply filthy. Do you mind?" He took her hand.

She said: "I never dreamt you'd be here at this hour. How are you, Mark? Yes, I got your letter. But I never expected you till this evening. It's very annoying that nothing is ready for you. Sarah, something is burning in the kitchen. I shouldn't stand there, Rebecca, with so much to be done; and I think you've forgotten your cap. Miss Bright—oh, she's gone."

Just the same Mabel! But he wasn't going to let her be the same! He had made up his mind to that as he had come along with eager strides from the station. She turned to him and they exchanged their greetings and he went on, pursuing his resolution: "Look here, I've got a tremendous idea. When I get through this cadet business I shall have quite a bit of leave *and* my Sam Browne belt. I thought we'd go up to town and stick up at an hotel—the Savoy or somewhere—and have no end of a bust. Theatres and all the rest of it. Shall we?"

That chilly, vexed manner of hers, caused as he well knew by the uproar of his arrival, disappeared. "Oh, I'd love to. Yes, do let's. Now you want a bath, don't you? I'm annoyed there was all that disturbance just when I was meeting you. I've been having a little trouble lately with——"

"Oh, well, never mind that now, Mabel. Come and watch me struggle out of this pack. Yes, look here, as soon as ever I know for certain when the course ends we'll write for rooms at the Savoy. I hear you have to do it weeks ahead. We'll spend pots of money and have no end of a time."

She reflected his good spirits. Ripping! He splashed and wallowed in the bath, singing lustily one of the songs out there:

"Ho, ho, ho, it's a lovely war."

VI

BUT the three days at home were not to go on this singing note. They were marred by the discovery that his suspicion was well founded—she *was* bullying Effie. He began to notice it at once. Effie, with whom he had anticipated a lot of fun, was different; not nearly so bright; subdued; her eyes, not always, but only by occasional flashes, sparkling that intense appreciation of the oddities of life that had so much attracted him in her. Yes, dash it, Mabel was treating her in a rotten way. Bullying. No, it was not exactly bullying, it was snubbing, a certain acid quality always present in Mabel's voice when she addressed her—that and a manner of always being what he thought of as "at her."

The girl seemed to have an astonishing number of quite trivial duties to perform—trivial, there certainly was no suggestion of her being imposed upon as he had always felt Miss Bypass up at the vicarage was imposed upon, but Mabel

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"'Pon my soul I couldn't have been more astonished if the door had been opened by the Kaiser carrying the Crown Prince."

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was perpetually and acidly "at her" over one trivial thing or another. It was forever "Miss Bright, I think you ought to be in the morning-room, oughtn't you?" "Miss Bright, I really must ask you not to leave your door open every time you come out of your room. You know how I dislike the doors standing open." "Miss Bright, if you've finished your tea there's really no need for you to remain."

He hated it. He said nothing, but it was often on the tip of his tongue to say something, and he showed that he intensely disliked it, and he knew that Mabel knew he disliked it. On the whole, it was rather a relief when the three days were up and he went down to the cadet battalion at Cambridge.

In March he came back, a second lieutenant; and immediately, when in time to come he looked back, things set in train for that ultimate encounter with life which was awaiting him.

The projected visit to town did not come off. While he was at Cambridge Mabel wrote to say that the Garden Home Amateur Dramatic Society was going to do "His Excellency the Governor" in aid of the Red Cross funds at the end of March. She was taking part, she was fearfully excited about it, and as rehearsals began early in the month she naturally could not be away. She was sure he would understand and would not mind.

He did not mind in the least. They were years past the stage when it would have so much as crossed his mind that she might give up this engagement for the sake of spending his leave on a bit of gaiety in town; he had only suggested the idea on her account; personally he much preferred the prospect of doing long walks about his beloved countryside now passing into spring.

VII

ARRIVING, he began at once to do so. He went over for one visit to the office at Tidborough. Not so much enthusiasm greeted him as to encourage a second. Twyning and Mr. Fortune were immersed in adapting the workshops to war work for the government. Normal business was coming to a standstill. Now Twyning had conceived the immense, patriotic and profitable idea of making airplane parts, and it was made sufficiently clear to Sabre that, so long away and immediately to be off again, there could be no interest for him in the enterprise.

"You won't want to go into all we are doing, my dear fellow," said Mr. Fortune. "Your hard-earned leave, eh? We mustn't expect you to give it up to business, eh, Twyning?"

And Twyning responded: "No, no, old man. Not likely, old man. Well, it's jolly to see you in the office again," and he looked at his watch and said a word to Mr. Fortune about "Meeting that man" with an air which quite clearly informed Sabre that it would be jollier still to see him put on his cap and walk out of the office again.

Well, it was only what he had expected; a trifle pronounced, perhaps, but the obvious sequel to their latter-day manner toward him; they had wanted to get him out; he was out and they desired to keep him out.

He rose to go. "Oh, that's all right. I'm not going to keep you. I only called in to show off my officer's uniform."

Twyning said: "Yes, congratulations again, old man." He laughed. "You mustn't think you're going to have Harold saluting you, though, if you ever meet. He's getting a commission too." His manner, directly he began to speak of Harold, changed to that enormous affection and admiration for his son which Sabre well remembered on the occasion of Harold joining up. His face shone, his mouth trembled with loving pride at what Harold had been through and what he had done. And he was such a good boy—wrote twice a week to his mother, and once when he was sick in hospital the padre of his battalion had written to say what a good and sterling boy he was. Yes, he had been recommended for a commission and was coming home that month to a cadet battalion at Bournemouth.

When Sabre made his congratulations, Twyning accompanied him down-stairs to the street and warmly shook his hand. "Thanks, old man; thanks most awfully. Yes, he's everything to me, my Harold. And of course it's a strain never knowing. Well, well, he's in God's hands; and he's such a good, earnest boy."

Extraordinarily different Twyning the father of Harold and Twyning in daily relations.

VIII

HIS leave drew on. He might get his orders any day now. Mabel was much occupied with her rehearsals. He spent his time in long walks alone and, whenever they were possible, in the old evenings with Mr. Fargus. In Mabel's absence he and Effie were much thrown together. Mabel frequently came upon them thus, and when she did she had a mannerism that somehow seemed to suggest "catching" them together. Two or three times she made use of that expression. It would have been uncommonly jolly to have had Bright Effie as companion on the walks, and once or twice he did. But Mabel showed very clearly that this was very far from having her approval and on the second occasion said so. There was the slightest possible little tiff about it; and thenceforward—the subject having been opened—there were frequent little passages over Effie, arising always out of his doing what Mabel called "forever sticking up for her." How frequent they were, and how much they annoyed Mabel, he did not realize until, in the last week of his leave, and in the midst of a sticking-up-for-her scene, Mabel surprisingly announced: "Well, anyway, I'm sick and tired of the girl, and I'm sick and tired of having you always sticking up for her, and I'm going to get rid of her—to-morrow."

He said: "To-morrow? How can you? I don't say it's not the best thing to do. She's pretty miserable, I should imagine, the way you're always at her, but you can't rush her off like that, Mabel."

"Well, I'm going to. I'm going to pay her up and let her go."

"But, Mabel—what will her people think?"

"I'm sure I don't care what they think. If you're so concerned about the precious girl, I'll tell her mother that I was going to make other arrangements in any case and that as this was your last week we thought we'd like to be alone together. Will that satisfy you?"

"I hope it will satisfy them. And I hope very much indeed that you won't do it."

IX

BUT she did do it. On the following day Effie left. Sabre, pretending to know nothing about it, went for a long walk all day. When he returned, Effie had gone. He said nothing. Her name was not again mentioned between him and Mabel. It happened that the only reference to her sudden departure in which he was concerned was with Twyning.

Setting out on his return to France—his orders were to join a Fusilier battalion, reporting to Thirty-fourth Division—he found Twyning on the platform at Tidborough station buying a paper.

"Hullo, old man," said Twyning. "Just off? I say, old man, old Bright's very upset about Effie getting the sack from your place like that. How was it?"

He felt himself flush. Beastly, having to defend Mabel's unfairness like this: "Oh, I fancy my wife had the idea of getting some relation to live with her, that's all."

Twyning was looking keenly at him. "Oh, I see. But a bit sudden, wasn't it? I mean to say, I thought you were on such friendly terms with the girl. Why, only a couple of days before she left I saw you with her having tea in the Cathedral tea-rooms. I don't think you saw me, did you, old man?"

"No, I didn't. Yes, I remember; we were waiting for my wife. There'd been a dress rehearsal of this play down at the Corn Exchange."

"Oh, yes, waiting for your wife, were you?" Twyning appeared to be thinking. "Well, that's what I mean, old man. So friendly with the girl—both of you—and then sending her off so suddenly like that."

Sabre essayed to laugh it off. "My wife's rather a sudden person, you know."

Twyning joined very heartily in the laugh. "Is she?" He looked around. "She's seeing you off, I suppose?"

"No, she's not. She's not too well. Got a rotten cold."

Twyning stared again in what struck Sabre as rather an odd way. "Oh, I'm sorry, old man. Nothing much, I hope. Well, you'll want to be getting in. I'll tell old Bright what you say about Effie. Nothing in it. I quite understand. Seemed a bit funny at first, that's all. Good-by, old man. Jolly good luck. Take care of yourself. Jolly good luck."

He put out his hand and squeezed Sabre's in his intensely friendly grip; and destiny put out its hand and added another, and a vital, hour to Sabre's ultimate encounter with life.

X

HIS leave ended with one thing utterly unexpected and flagrantly impossible. One of those meetings so astounding in the fact that the deviation of a single minute, of half a minute, of what one has been doing previously would have prevented it; and out of it one of those frightful things that ought to come with premonition, by hints, by stages, but that come careering

(*Continued on page 89*)

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PROSE OR WORSE

(Sign in St. Louis Ice-Cream Studio)

Take home a brick for your wife.

Better make it two, the first might miss her.

(From a Canadian Daily)

May Hold Joint Carnival—An Application from the Woman's Amateur Swimming Club for the use of the Cornish baths to give a gala or carnival for the benefit of the Returned Soldiers' Association, and a similar application from the Victoria Ladies' Swimming Club was referred to the executive of the R. S. A. with permission to arrange for a joint display.

Must be "open season" for joints, in Canada.

(From an Indiana paper)

Lost—A female water spaniel, tip of tail white, white breast, big ears. Whoever has this dog, oh, dear! let her mistress have her. She is going on 8 years old. I raised her from a baby. Oh, dear! a liberal reward you shall have. Mrs. W. B. Hart, W. 12th Street.

I repeat, oh, dear! OH, DEAR!

(Rice Lake, Wisconsin, Chronotype)

A peculiar accident is reported from Abbotsford. Fred Wedeking, a young man of that place, slipped and fell on a bowling alley, striking the side of his head against the corner of an electric piano. No one saw the accident, but a few seconds later some one noticed that one of his ears was gone. It was the first he had heard about it, but sure enough upon making an investigation he found he was minus an ear. The lost member was found lying on the floor near the piano and with its owner was taken to Doctor Johnson's office, where it was put back in place, and is growing on again.

Some ear for music.

(Ad of Elmhurst School for Girls, Indiana)

Only 24 pupils. All sports.

Let me see, what railroad is Elmhurst on?

(Lipscomb, Texas, Limelight)

This morning the 7th and 8th grade pupils and their teacher prepared themselves to meander out in the rural districts to enjoy the first real summer days romping around in some secluded spot for recreation where the out door sunshine will add its warmth to the occasion. Many games will be indulged in and the pupils will forget the duties of school for a short time. The young folks came in later reporting a pleasant time.

If it should rain they plan to go again week before last.

(Creston, Iowa, Advertiser-Gazette)

His accompaniments were played by Madam Myron Smith, and the fine rich voice of Mr. Hollenbeck together with the beautifully furnished and decorated rooms, made the guests feel as if they were in a much larger city than Creston.

Such as Keokuk, for instance.

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SIGNS?

On the beach near Miller, Indiana: "*Price 25 cents, with or without suits.*"

On a vacant lot in Evanston, Illinois: "*This lot for sale. Apply within.*"

On Lake Street, Chicago: "*All kinds of pork products and sausages.*"

Des Moines, Iowa, church notice: "*Evening service at 8; topic, 'Melted by Kindness.' If it is hot the services will be on the lawn at the fire house.*"

From the register of White Lake Inn, Montague, Michigan: "*Mr. James Sherman and horse and wife.*"

In a Wichita restaurant: "*Not responsible for articles stolen unless left with the cashier.*"

On a Brooklyn M. E. church: "*Abbreviated short sermons.*"

In New Orleans: "*Shave and glass bear, 5c.*"

(Findlay Republican)

Dale Cramer was attacked at Hoytville Saturday night and struck in the head with a hammer. Mr. Cramer was in the McComb band.

Probably on one of his regular toots.

(Dunkirk Standard)

Carl Hiller of Hawkeye had the misfortune to lose his collar and tie last Sunday evening. Any one finding either of these articles please return them to the owner.

Any time before next Sunday will do.

(Ochiltree, Texas, News)

Bogus Wilbanks, who has been laid up and is now at his home, is now on the mend. In several weeks he was unable to raise a knife to his mouth.

They make his soup thicker, now.

(Jacksonville, Florida, Observer)

Mr. Kennedy, the organist at the First Baptist Church during the Risner meetings, is from Michigan. His skill and fineness of touch in organ work reminds one of the old masters. His notes please, soothe, thrill. There is music in his gentlest, delicate notes like that of Apollo's lute, and the full, grand organ climaxes rise and swell with the majesty of thunder and the grandeur of the storm, then die away as softly, as sweetly as the vesper notes of an Eolean harp in the clouds of Heaven. His organ seems the abode of a thousand invisible voices, a chorus of nightingales singing in the valley of shadows, or the sound of many waters in far-away somewhere. "If Music be the food of love," then, as Shakespeare says, "play on."

If you're waking, call me early, call me early, mother dear.

Another collection of "Prose or Worse" will appear in the June issue of EVERYBODY'S.

(Manufacturers' News)

The largest boat ever put on the Illinois river, being 80 feet longer and some wider than the Bald Eagle, is now being constructed at Paducah, Ky., and will make her maiden trip up the river in June. She is to be known as the Peoria and will be equipped with eighty state rooms. It will be capable of accommodating 1,000 hogs.

"Whew, how sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this deck," as Shylock whispered to Portia.

(Newcastle, Pennsylvania, News)

Mr. McVerne, an attractive and handsome man, belongs to one of the oldest families in the city. He is a graduate of Mount Pleasant Academy, a member of all the leading clubs, and a general favorite. As a groom Mr. McVerne never looked better than in his wedding garb, which consisted of a black suit, beautifully cut in the latest style, with tie and shoes to match. On his bosom glistened his only ornament, an exquisite heart shaped pin set with diamonds and opals, a gift of the bride. The ceremony took place in the living-room under a rose bower, to which place the groom proceeded, supporting his mother, and followed by the ushers. There he was met by the bride and her attendants. The ushers in their attractive attire gave an added charm to the scene. Mr. Wm. Stalman, a brother of the bride, wore a brown suit with accessories to match. Mr. Luther Starr wore gray with a ciel blue tie. Mr. Cecil Wenting wore dark blue with cream hose and tie and Mr. Holland Grosner wore light tan with green accessories.

Here comes the bride!

(Sparta, Tennessee, Expositor)

Henry Hollingsworth is some better at this writing.

Mr. Frank Simmons family are all sick.

Mr. Luther Simmons is some better now.

Little Orville Davis is sick.

Little Misses Gladys and Thelma Lee Savage are real sick.

It seems that news is scarce.

Or as the new reporter, assigned to write up a wedding, said:—"No story to tell, the groom didn't show up."

(Dayton, Ohio, Press Dispatch)

John Zickus, 24, didn't get to act as best man at the wedding of a friend to-day. He vented his wrath by hitting the pastor, the Rev. M. Cubaleski, on the nose. Women of the congregation then mobbed and beat Zickus. After he was rescued by a police squad he was arraigned in Police Court on a charge of assault and battery. The wedding was a success in other respects.

Everybody satisfied.

(Paoli, Indiana)

The stork visited Irvin Trinkle Monday morning and presented him with a new son, all getting along fine except grandpa Sorrels, and he was able to hobble around on crutches this A.M.

Pretty near ruined Gramp.

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It was a rare event on that island when the little Aoranga *anchored out in the brilliant blue.*

The Keeper of the Gate

By Katharine Fullerton Gerould

THIS is the story of a man and woman who tried to make for themselves a special paradise and "dared too much." The story of the experiment is told with Mrs. Gerould's characteristic distinction and charm. Mrs. Gerould ranks among our foremost women short-story writers, and "The Keeper of the Gate" is up to the high standard she has set in her remarkable collection of stories entitled "Vain Oblations."

TRASK stood at the very point of the slender palm-laden spit of land, staring out toward the reef. He could not, in the glare of gold and peacock-blue (it was high noon), see the irregular whiteness of foam that marked the reef, but he knew where it was, and what it stood for. The habit of long months sharpened his vision until he almost thought he could detect that white unrest. The waves rolled tenderly up to the low shore a few feet from him, their violence checked out there where the reef broke the onslaught of an ocean.

If he turned his head half-way, he could see the poinsettias, the hibiscus, the bougainvilleas, and the wild portent of the huge monkey-pod in full flower. He did not have to turn his head to breathe the scented garden that lay behind him. As the sun melted purple, crimson, and scarlet into one tolerable vividness, so the salt air and the gentle heat of the atmosphere blended the conflicting odors into something less than overpowering, something rich and bland and wholly sweet. An eighth of a mile inland an insistent waterfall would set its plash above the subdued crooning of the waves, even above the gentle clatter of the palm fronds.

Never had more beauties been conjoined in a single scene, never had so many fruits for the plucking lain close to any one man's hand. Not one single sense but was gratified, pampered, lulled. Never hot, never cold, never too much or too little, because the tropics were in leash here to the steady fingers of the Trade; always perfection; even in the rare storm, a splendor that repaid.

NOR was love absent. Was not Leila, his wife, sleeping her light sleep, there beyond him, even now—a crisp white thing lying, slender, on a bamboo couch? They had sought paradise, and they had found it. They had even a perpetual lease of it, one might say. There was no reason on earth why they should ever leave it. All sordidness was hidden away in Quong's own little compound at the heart of the banana grove. Their food was manna; the white garb they affected came to them, from Quong's competent hands, fresh and unconsidered as fig leaves. Certainly they had managed cannily. Back in New York he had not dreamed how well they could put it through. In their fervor they had determined to ignore obstacles, but the obstacles had simply not risen. He had had misgivings, but not one misgiving had been justified by the event.

Still, he looked out to the surmised line of the reef, wondering. The *Aoranga* was due next week. Three times during their sojourn on the island the little *Aoranga* had anchored out in the brilliant blue and sent in laden boats—only three times; yet they had never lacked for anything. It was incredible, when you stopped to think of it. If the people who had scoffed at home could see them!

Of course if anything happened to Quong, the light *would* go out. Trask didn't think Quong had seemed quite himself lately, but it did not trouble him. They had had eighteen months, and the most sympathetic had given them only a jaded three. Even if anything happened now—Trask thrust out his chin truculently—hadn't they proved their point? He was not in the least worried about Quong. They would let the *Aoranga's* surgeon look at Quong, if necessary.

But as far as he, Trask, could see, they could go on for years in paradise—yes, years. No obstacles at all. He would really like to see those half-forgotten scoffing friends at home and tell them a few things, just "show" them, for five minutes, and rush back to Leila—only five minutes, merely time enough to prove that no one had ever been so wise or so happy or so miraculously fortunate as the Trasks.

A little gusty breeze sprang up, and the palm leaves clashed far above his head.

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He stretched out on the sands and closed his eyes. The reef was forgotten, and the *Aoranga*. Only five minutes to prove it. He slid into a noon-tide dream.

Bertram Trask was past his first youth when he married Leila Bent, and she was not a débutante. But when she fell in love with Trask she was fresh enough for sentiment, though ripe for passion. She had liked Trask's writing before she ever met him; but not more than she liked the work—printed or painted or played—of a dozen others. It was Trask in the flesh, first encountered, that had given her the *coup de grâce*, and she had really been his from the first moment.

On Trask's side, he had liked the things he heard of her from common friends; but until he took her out to dinner two weeks after she returned from Europe he had had no inkling that she would be more than another charming young woman. You might have called it love at first sight with both of them—except that it was more exciting than that. When Trask spoke at last, it was a mere finale to an overture every note of which had had the inevitability of great music. They suited each other to the last detail. That something which is over and above passion, or congeniality, or sentiment, or fitness, had come to them—that inexpressible power of each to expand in space and prolong in time, for the other, every delightful trait. Each to the other was not only perfect but inexhaustible, new every morning and fresh every evening, an unfailing phenomenon that brought an uncloyed reaction. But it is an ill business to describe the essence of true love, and the statement must suffice.

Like all lovers, they wanted to get free of this world to make their own. Unlike many lovers, they could afford it; unlike most, they had the courage to try. To build a house not made with hands, place invisible walls around themselves in the crowded purlieus of life, did not suffice; they must really isolate themselves, make the metaphorical shipwreck and "desert island" of all lovers real and actual. Their common cleverness solved the problem, and as Trask told himself to-day, before he fell asleep on the sand, it had all worked out as they had had no right to hope.

The desolation of Crusoe had been predicted for them, but they had had the luck of the Swiss Family Robinson. On this hint, Trask dropped to slumber in the bland air. Straightway he dreamed of those five minutes of impassioned demonstration to his friends at home.

THE nap was not long, though delicious as only those slumbers are which are snatched at the wrong time. Quong came to summon him to luncheon. Sitting up on the warm sand rubbing his eyes, Trask had a moment of sleepy wonder. It was odd that Leila had not come herself, and certainly Quong looked queer. But Leila perhaps had waked a bit late, and Quong's drawn aspect might be due only to the drowsiness he had not fully shaken out of his own eyes.

Ten minutes later he was facing Leila across the embowered table. The drowsiness had not gone out of her eyes, by the way; her lids looked heavy, though she had a lovely primrose color in her cheeks.

"What shall we do?"

One or the other of them always asked the question after luncheon. It was part of the paradise game; part of the never-ending attitude that never had there been such an adventure as theirs, and that the hours must always be met in a romantic spirit. Never had either one admitted that their island was not inexhaustible.

"We might take the launch later and go out to the reef."

"Yes. And meanwhile?"

"Oh, read something."

"I'm very sorry, Bertram, but I'm afraid I've read everything in the house twice. I finished 'Richard Feverel' again last night."

"So have I," he grinned. "Everything. But cheer up. The *Aoranga* is due next week, and we ordered boxes of stuff. Mercer has never failed on our orders yet. He's a kind of fairy godmother over there in San Francisco. Wonderful to keep your fairy godmother so far away, and yet have her pull it off."

"ISN'T it?" Leila Trask flushed with enthusiasm. "Mercer has never fallen down on anything—even your special tobacco and the bobbins for the sewing-machine. Yes, of course the *Aoranga* is due. We must have ordered hundreds of books. And I really am awfully impatient to see my new evening dresses. I had to give Carter her head except as to color."

"I can't see why you don't have Carter stick to a model you like. Fashions here are too absurd."

"Ah, no!" It seemed to him that Leila spoke passionately. "Not that. We must keep it up. It's part of the plan."

"It was never part of my plan to make uncomfortable concessions to people who live five thousand miles away in a north-east wind."

"I don't call it a concession to them. They'll never know. Wasn't it part of your plan—it was of mine—to be just as civilized and just as varied here, away from everything, as there, in the midst of things? Not to slump."

"But we haven't slumped!" He found himself saying it with absurd emphasis, as though it were a mighty matter of doctrine.

"Of course we haven't." She, too, underscored the words. "And frocks and new novels and new opera records and all that help out. Our whole point was not to revert, wasn't it? To take the best of this, and not subdue ourselves to the rest of it."

"It was too much to ask of the gods."

Trask hardly knew why he said it. Certainly his conviction of their wisdom had never been deeper than that day. Had he not wanted to shout it to his former friends; to defy the reef itself? But just then some shadow, out of dim and ancient times, seemed to gather about his shoulders; some sense of malevolent deities and principles who waited. The twice-born soul walks in a wise fear. Suddenly it seemed to him that you might ask too much of the gods; that they might give you a rope long enough to encircle the globe, yet hobble you at the last.

But it passed, and seeing Leila staring, with parted lips, he laughed it off.

"No one so superstitious as those beyond superstitition," he mocked. "An hour ago I was smitten with wonder at our luck. This is sheer reaction. I hope Mercer managed to get the Burgundy in time for the *Aoranga*. And do you realize that the *saké* and my tobacco are going to last just another fortnight? Really it is stupendous!"

"And I have just one bottle of *eau de cologne* left. Bless the *Aoranga*! It *is* stupendous!"

Then both laughed. "We're all right, as long as we don't boast," he said. "I think we've boasted enough for to-day. The *Aoranga* might be late."

"Oh, but I can get on for weeks and weeks without *eau de cologne*. Even if Mercer left it out—or is that boasting, too?"

"You never boast." He put his arm round her, and they wandered out toward the little plaisance enclosed and shadowed by colossal hibiscus hedges. "It's I. I was boasting like fun all by myself out on the point, while you were sleeping. I am the guilty one. I am original sin, and all the things that mean retribution. You are perfect. And that's not boasting, for God knows I didn't make you."

"As far as I'm any good at all, you did make me. Without you, I'm nothing very delightful, I'm afraid," her voice faltered a little as she sat down in the slanting shadow of the hibiscus.

Leila Trask put on her oldest frock for dinner that night. Torn and mended, stained and cleaned, it still kept its luminous tint by candle-light, and she, wearing it, had always the look of a fine, pale flame, with I know not what hint of aspiration.

"It's going"—she answered the look of Trask's eyes—"and next week there'll be no excuse any more for wearing it. But we always liked it best, and I can't bear not to get a few more 'wears' out of it."

"DID you tell Carter to send you another just like it? I hope you did."

"Oh, dear, no! You can perhaps have too much of a thing you like." Then she softened. "If it comes to that, isn't it better to—well, domesticate every color that I can wear? There is to be nothing flame-colored on the *Aoranga*."

"I'm sorry." He helped himself to fish cunningly wrapped and cooked in *ti* leaves; then exclaimed because Quong, holding the platter, lurched lightly against him. The Chinaman recovered himself at once, but, instead of apologizing, stared across the table at the farther wall with glittering, dilated eyes.

Trask, startled and troubled, watched him silently until he left the room. It was very disquieting. Could Quong possibly be drunk? A stealthy glance at Leila showed her unconcerned, aware of nothing. He would not speak to her, he thought, unless it was necessary. It didn't seem wholly like drink, yet it was totally unnatural. Vaguely, he was glad that the *Aoranga* was due. Quong hadn't been looking well, as he had remarked, but there had never seemed to be any uncertainty, any slipping-up of control, before.

Quong served the rest of the meal without faltering, though his eyes, usually so opaque and insignificant, seemed to be enlarged and filled with a shining, sinister meaning. Perhaps, after all, he had better ask Leila if she had noticed anything. He certainly couldn't run the risk of her being bothered. Quong might turn into a nuisance at some moment when he himself was out of call.

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As soon as they were alone, he put it to her. "Has Quong seemed to you queer?"

"Quong?" she looked startled.

"Yes, lately. Did you notice that he nearly fell on the table to-night when he passed me the fish?"

"I must have been looking the other way."

"Anyhow, I'll watch him a bit. If he were ill, very likely he wouldn't tell. You remember the time he had black colic and didn't come for medicine. He's been looking a little strange for days. Maybe a touch of fever or something. It's very hard to tell with a Chinaman. They haven't got complexion or pulses or reactions like any one else. I'll have a heart-to-heart talk with him to-morrow morning. Though I must say it's like thinking you can talk to a jar of orange marmalade because it has an English label."

"Let me talk to him." Leila Trask sat up very straight in her deep basket-chair. "I know his grunts better than you do. And he always comes to me for things. I am sure that is simpler."

"He didn't seem to be drunk," Trask mused.

"He couldn't be drunk," Mrs. Trask exclaimed. "In the first place, except for your bit of whisky that you keep locked up, we haven't anything for him to get drunk on. Light wines don't appeal to Chinamen, and besides ours don't disappear. He has never exceeded his *saké* allowance. And in the second place, he'd have shown it earlier. I spoke to him in the pantry before dinner, and he was quite natural."

"No, I don't think it's drink," Trask agreed. "It seemed more subtle than that; as if paresis might be coming on, or some obscure derangement of the system. I'll get the surgeon to look at him next week."

"Oh, yes, surely that's better." Leila sank back with a sigh of relaxation.

Then she began to talk about Meredith. At the end of half an hour she drew out of the atmosphere of delicate epigram in which they had been letting themselves go, as if spurred to the move by the compliment with which Trask had irrelevantly ended, "Jove, but you're fun to talk to, Leila!"

"THANK you." She pressed his hand. "Especially as my mind has rather been wandering back to that absurd Quong. I'm so used to his little ways and his funny complaints and the general oddity of the routine, I haven't been worried about him. But it is quite true that he had asked me for something to relieve his asthma—the old thing, you know, he has always been subject to now and then; what he calls his 'devil in the throat.' There has been some devil in the throat lately, but it has never been so bad as last year. The surgeon of the *Aoranga* said then it wasn't serious."

"I remember. This doesn't seem like 'devil in the throat' at all. Oh, well, I dare say it's my imagination, if you haven't noticed anything. But I'll have a go at him in the morning in case he's still jerky."

Trask rose, and with a girdling arm drew his wife out to the extreme verge of the veranda. The moon had risen high during their talk, and now the beauty of the night took them. They wandered down to the palm-fringed shore; and Quong, the *Aoranga*, and Meredithian heroes were all forgotten.

Even in that miraculously artificial and even more miraculously natural life of theirs it was impossible not to feel an accelerated beat of the pulse, a sense of climax, as the time drew near for the *Aoranga* to anchor outside the reef and send in the commissioner of the laden boats. The commissioner was less exciting than the boats, it must be confessed. The natives never gave them trouble. The island life flowed on round their headland, picturesque sometimes as they caught sight of it, but never intrusive. Business was transacted wholly by Quong. Was it strange that they had come to consider themselves distinguished guests of the universe, or that Trask had even come to wonder a little what the gods of his ancient pantheon were up to?

HE HAD little success in his talk with Quong, who, though admitting devil in the throat, was more stolid than ever. Trask shrugged and gave it up. But the prospect of turning Quong over to the *Aoranga's* surgeon grew more pleasant. Of course if Quong were really ready for collapse, if some secret disorder were the reason of the eye-glitter, the jerk and pause of stocky limbs, the sudden spiritual removal from Quong's context of all that was Quong, then they *would* have to throw up the sponge.

Of none of this did he speak to Leila. She, too, was restless, waiting for the *Aoranga*. Gone, for the moment, was the bland and tranquil sweep of daily living; the rhythm quiet as sun or moon. The steamer had never, in their experience, been much out of her schedule. "On or about" the twentieth they might expect her. Of course they must give her a margin; but steam and the commercial importance of her other ports of call—it was only to visit them that she drew out of the world of real affairs—assured them of her regularity. It might be only "about," but Trask felt sure it would be "on."

The night of the nineteenth, Bertram Trask felt curiously tired. Usually they watched the moon throughout her course, never going to bed until she had risen, however late. To-night his apologies could hardly space his yawns. What would Leila think of him? But she did not protest—only laughed.

"We mustn't be silly about it," she said. "There was bound to come a time when one or the other of us would want to go to bed before she rose, in the last quarter. Do go. I'm going to sit up a little longer because I'm not sleepy—that is, if you don't mind my keeping lights on for a time."

"Of course not. Only I feel a pig to let you sit up for the moon by yourself."

"Don't worry. I shan't even look at her; I'll go over our list and play a game about how many things Mercer might have made a mistake about. Or else I'll write another letter or two. The minute I feel sleepy, I'll go to bed. Probably I shall get drowsy myself when I know you're asleep."

Trask left her, and very soon, in his own room, went to sleep.

It must have been two hours later that he was wakened by a stifled cry from Leila. At first he could not localize the sound—only seemed to know, while he fought with the paralysis of sleep, that Leila had called out, somewhere, somehow, and that he must find her. It might have been mixed up with a dream.

In the few seconds it took him to struggle up from his bed and fling on a dressing-gown the house had become miraculously still. Was it a dream? He opened the door into her room. That was dark and undisturbed. There was no light anywhere that he could see. He walked quickly into the living-room; dark, too. He glanced into the dining-room as he passed, and saw, he thought, a line of light under the pantry door. But just as he turned to investigate the insignificant glimmer, he noticed a white figure on the vast veranda that made a full half of their dwelling-space, and he lifted the bamboo hanging and stepped out into the faint moonlight.

It must be late. The moon, a ghastly crescent, was nearly down to the horizon. As he set foot on the veranda, Leila passed round the eastern corner of the house wall, out of his vision, as though making for the kitchen quarters. Sleep was squeezed out of him by that time. He hastened his pace and followed her. The cry, he was sure, had been real.

It took him a moment to grasp the scene before him as he stared into the pantry, and even as he blinked at it, it changed before his eyes. The pantry was part of the cottage itself, but it opened into a mist of air and verdure, a trellised outdoor passage to the kitchen, which lay thirty feet beyond in a separate shack. There were no cooking smells in paradise. Beyond was the banana grove with Quong's own bower in its bosom.

THE door that gave on the trellised passage was wide open, and Quong, huddled in his loose black clothes, was leaning weakly against the jamb. The light of the one candle on the pantry table made a mere smudge of him. Trask could hardly tell whether the huddle was, theoretically, standing or recumbent. Practically, it seemed to be half-way between the two. But, more important, the huddle was groaning. For some reason, Trask stared adequately at Quong before turning to look at Leila, though he knew that the white cloud within his fringe of vision was surely his wife and nothing else. Having taken Quong in, he turned to her. Yes, it was Leila: Leila roused from sleep, her hair in a long braid, clothed in a white dressing-gown with sweeping, prolix folds. It was her own silver candlestick that squatted on the table. One hand was at her throat—a familiar gesture of hers in perplexity. The other clutched an empty bottle.

"What is the matter? Why didn't you wake me?" The sharp note of sense broke from Trask's lips.

Quong went on with his business of groaning, oddly methodical about it, in spite of his collapse. Mrs. Trask did not turn to her husband. She seemed unable to take her horrified eyes from Quong, but she put out her hand sideways to Trask, shaking free as she did so the bottle, which tinkled to the floor.

Trask grasped her fingers with cruel tightness. If she wouldn't look at him, she must at least speak.

"What is it?" he repeated.

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The white garb they affected came to them from Quong's competent hands, fresh and unconsidered as fig leaves.

She was still staring at Quong as she answered, and her voice was as level and quiet as if she were mesmerized. "It's devil in the throat. He wanted medicine. I gave him the few drops that were left. There isn't any more. You can see he's queer."

Trask turned to the moaning Chinaman. "He is breathing badly. I'll get some more of the stuff—give him a bigger dose. But you must come with me. It won't take a minute. Bring that glass." He started to lead her away from the pantry.

"There isn't any more."

"No more! We've hardly tapped the medicine chest. There was plenty of it. Come." He pulled at her. "The man's suffering horribly, and you can't stay here alone with him."

"I tell you there isn't another drop. I've just given him the last." Her voice was matter-of-fact and quite natural, except that it was not natural for Leila Trask's voice to be so completely unmodulated. She had not removed her eyes, still, from the black huddle, and Trask had the horrid sense that Quong's moans and her steady stare made a kind of conversation between them—an interchange from which he was barred.

"There must be more. There were two or three bottles."

"He's had the last drop."

Trask stepped between his wife and the path of her unswerving gaze. He seized her shoulders and turned her about by

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main force to face the dining-room. Then he drew—dragged, you might say, had she not been so light a burden—her inside the room and disposed her, as gently as he could, on a long chair that stood just within.

"If he has had all that stuff, he's poisoned. How much have you given him the past week?"

"I don't just know." At rest in the darkness, she had broken down and was crying.

"Think, Leila, think—for I've got to do something quickly. How much has he had within a few hours?"

"Not much."

"When has he had all the stuff? Has it been a matter of days or weeks?"

"Days, I think." He could hardly make the words out.

"Pull up, Leila." He spoke more loudly in his distress. "This may be life or death. You must come with me. I can't leave you here. And I've got to look up the antidote and get it to him without any delay. Did you give him the bottle? Or did you dole it out?"

"Don't ask me. Both, I think. I'll come."

But her sobs were growing hysterical, and Trask much doubted if she could come unless he carried her. He struck a match—it was somehow impossible to take the candle away from the pantry table and leave Quong in darkness—and fastened the clumsy bolt of the dining-room door. At least she would be safe there for a moment, while he went into the bathroom and hunted for the antidote. First, to be sure, he must discover what the antidote was. He propped his wife in a safe position whence even the violence of hysteria would not dislodge her, and dashed to the bathroom. Luckily there was a candle at hand.

A hasty search, during which the leaves of the first-aid guide flapped and bunched to delay him as if a devil were among them, divulged the fact that morphin was the antidote. He groped, with his candle, for the familiar, unopened bottle. It was not forthcoming. Firmly, denying his agitation, he went into his bedroom, lighted the lamp and brought it back. Then bottle by bottle, box by box, he went over the contents of the cupboard, naming the things softly to himself as he counted them off.

THE morphin simply was not there. It was not many days ago that he had knocked it over, himself, reaching for a new box of shaving-powder. But it was definitely gone; and if Leila had no guess to offer, no one could help him—certainly not the writhing, moaning Quong, doubtless the guilty one, but of no avail in this emergency.

Trask went back to the dining-room. Leila was still crying, though, he hoped—curious that he should hope, instead of trusting his senses to feel sure—a little more quietly. He spoke to her very gently, but very clearly. "Dear, do you know where the morphin tablets are?"

"Not now."

"Where were they when you saw them last?"

"They were in the cabinet a week ago."

"What makes you say 'not now?' Have you any reason to think Quong could have taken them?"

The question seemed to rouse and to calm her. "I don't believe so. He was dreadfully afraid of pills unless we gave them to him."

"I saw it a week ago myself, Leila. But there's no morphin there."

"Everything is so horrible!" she moaned. "Will he die?"

The quick fear was at Trask's own heart as he unbolted the door and made ready to face Quong. There was no time to find the stuff, even if it were somewhere about. If Quong had purloined it, he was now too far gone to retrieve his own error. With his hand on the door-latch, Trask turned.

"We've got to do without it," he muttered. He could hear the mechanical moaning again now from the pantry, and its unchanging rhythm gave him some hope.

"LEILA!" For the first time in their lives he spoke to her with real sharpness—a matter of instinctive judging that no other tone would serve. "Get up and go into the bathroom—there's a lamp there—and bring me the first-aid book. Then, if you find you're pretty steady, go back and fetch another lamp and bring it in here. If you can't manage that, fetch two more candles. We'll need light. But be quick about it."

He helped her to her feet and watched her unsteady start for the bathroom. Until he saw how much she was good for, he could undertake nothing. He hated to send poor Leila off alone even on such a simple errand, but he had to. He must know where he stood in this strange midnight, how much he could count on her for. And if Quong was going to die on their hands, it was better that she should be by, if possible—poor Leila! Not that a man's wife would be much listened to; but—yes, it would dispose of some things.

All these reflections tossed turbidly together in his mind; coexisting without sequence. It could not have been more than sixty seconds before Mrs. Trask returned with the book.

"Can you get the lamp?"

"Oh, yes."

She turned back, while Trask searched the pages hastily by candle-light. The moaning in the pantry was still going on, though it sounded now a little fainter. Hardly ten minutes as yet, probably, had gone to the whole garish episode, yet it seemed to have lasted half the night. He looked intently at the page, imprinting the brief directions on his brain, so that he could repeat them mechanically. "Hypodermic injections of morphia." Well, there was no morphia. "Evacuation of the poison by means of the stomach-pump."

Trask laughed a little here, noiselessly, at his own folly. Of course paradise was not paradise without a stomach-pump! How could he ever have boasted? "Hot coffee"—to that he clung. Quong must have a great deal of hot coffee at once. Could Leila make it? "Emetics"—he groaned. Emetics first, and then coffee? He did not know, and the book did not make it clear. The book banked heavily on the stomach-pump; it had not been compiled for people in their position.

Leila had returned with the lamp. So far, so good. He stood for a few seconds, measuring her capacity with querying eyes. She looked very lovely, in spite of the roughly dried tear-stains. In that instant of perfect silence he heard, as plainly as any sound that had ever reached his physical ear, the distant beat of the *Aoranga's* engines—not as he had heard it earlier, by grace of imagination, but as a definite thud, sense-perceived. He was suddenly afraid of his own nerves.

"I am going in to Quong. There is no telling what we (he deliberately included her) may have to do. You must make strong coffee at once, over the spirit lamp—somehow. I leave it to you. Later you may have to help me with artificial respiration. The sooner we have the coffee the more chance there is for him. It may be"—he felt absurdly like a lord of life and death—"I shall have to give him an emetic first. That will mean hot water, too. So run and light the spirit lamp. Hot water is the first thing." He turned away.

"I can do everything much faster in the kitchen."

He had not dared to suggest that unfamiliar haunt of Quong's to her, but he agreed with enthusiastic haste. As he opened the door and crossed to the limp huddle, he saw Leila catch up the flowing folds of her gown and tuck them into her girdle that she might move more freely.

He bent over Quong, staring into the dilated eyes, the flush that made his face like a blood-orange, the general delirious aspect. Luckily, though the motor nerves were obviously affected, there was no sign yet of coma, which was the thing he most dreaded. As though in response to Trask's proximity, the mechancial moaning changed to delirious babble. It struck Trask with infinitely comic effect that Quong seemed happy.

AS THE preceding quarter of an hour had seemed to expand indefinitely and to shelter decades under its black wing, so now the feet of time seemed to be suddenly unclogged. That static horror was over. Things moved. With incredible, dizzying promptness Leila returned with a bowl—full, almost overflowing, disgustingly warm. The emetic had been constituted. Trask took it from her.

"There's more," she murmured gravely.

"Now go and make a lot of coffee," he whispered.

Why they lowered their voices neither could have told. Quong's delirium was as far as possible from suggesting the imminence of death. Bowl in hand, he waited until the flutter of his wife's white robe was lost in the shack at the end of the perfumed vista. A light wind stirred the scent of ginger in the compound until it was almost overpowering. He cramped himself for his task.

Ten minutes later he waved a warning hand at his wife, returning with a pot of coffee. "Keep out," he said. "Don't come any nearer than you have to, to put that where I can reach it. Bring a cup. And then you had better go and dress. The delirium is passing, and then is going to be the bad time. He'll be limp and heavy, and we shall have to keep at him. If we can keep him breathing for the next few hours, he may pull through. Don't come in."

Indeed, Leila Trask had already flung back from the threshold—for purely physical reasons. But she obeyed his

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Quong had asked for something to relieve his asthma; what he called his "devil in the throat."

instructions minutely and with speed. She dressed herself carefully, and then, light-footed, betook herself to the kitchen, where she made more coffee, not only for Quong but for herself and Trask. She cut sandwiches and piled them close at hand, against the probable faintness of a later hour. Then she filled and brought two other lamps, in case of need.

It was dawn when Trask finally summoned her to the veranda, whither he had dragged his patient on the long chair from the living-room. "Later we must get him to walk if we can. But now it's stiff work for both of us to keep his heart going. I think it's hopeful. Things have worked so far." He shivered a little in the cool of the last hour of night. "Look at the book. You might read aloud what it says. Pray heaven we get the motions right. Better look at the confounded diagrams, too." His voice was cracking with weariness, but so far it held.

Neither one ever knew how they got through the heart-breaking, back-breaking hour that followed. The risen sun stared at their last convulsive efforts, their motions spaced and desperate like those of a machine running down. By the time they had learned the art of the process, they had no strength left to practise cunningly. But Quong's eyelids were fluttering, and they had galvanized his limbs to power. Though limp still, he could move.

Delirium had gone somewhere in the unmarked hours of the night, and now the coma was broken. Finally his unglittering eyes were open on the dawn. It actually seemed possible, in that adorable morning light, to leave him for a little—singly, of course—to bathe one's face, to stretch out one's tortured limbs, to drink a deep draft of coffee, even perhaps to eat a little.

Leila insisted on Trask's leaving the veranda first. "You've had the worst of it. I've more strength left. There's nothing to do now but watch him. I'll call you if I need you."

Even then Trask did not trust himself to praise her; he must not relax so far from the taut manner of the crisis. They must discuss nothing, not let themselves down in talk, until help came. Help meant the *Aoranga;* there was nothing else for it to mean. Meanwhile, hard work, and an unbroken vigil by the prostrate Quong.

IT WAS nearly noon before Quong spoke, and in his natural tone; an absurd one always, but very reassuring. He smiled, and his smile was not beautiful. "*Aoranga,*" he murmured.

"Yes—*Aoranga* due," Mrs. Trask replied, slowing her syllables. "Not here yet."

"Here now." He shut his eyes, but the disfiguring smile remained.

Trask rose with one nervous spring from his chair. "Do you suppose"—he began.

"I don't know. But you must go and see. Take the glass and look. If you see anything, blow the horn. That will bring Kalafu or some of the boys. They must know she's due, too, and there'll be a lot of canoes about. You might paddle out to the reef, if there's any sign. And as soon as a boat comes in, you had better go straight out and fetch the surgeon. One of the crew could help you with the launch; but it might be quicker to go back in the first boat the *Aoranga* sends." She chattered on briskly, lavishing advice.

"But how can I leave you?" He pointed at Quong.

"There's nothing any one can do for him now until the surgeon comes—just not to leave him alone. And I can't manage the other end of it as you can."

"Have you thought at all—" He broke off. How could he go into all that until the *Aoranga* really came to relieve them? Superstition tightened upon him.

Leila Trask looked at her husband gravely—too gravely, almost, yet emotion stirred under her grave mask. "I've thought of everything in earth or sky or sea. I've circumnavigated the planet. When we are relieved—oh, you'll find me ready enough to discuss. Life is very different since yesterday."

Trask turned away and, rounding the corner of the veranda, walked to the front of the house. In a few moments he came back. "They're crowding down at the shore." He could hardly keep his voice steady. "I shouldn't wonder if Quong was right, and she is there. Perhaps I had better go."

"Oh, yes!" she cried. "At once! Don't wait a moment."

He bent to kiss her. As he lifted his head, he scrutinized the limp figure in the chair. It breathed regularly and easily now, though its eyes were still shut. "He was the keeper of the gate, you know," Trask murmured. "I wonder— But you're right. We'll talk later. As soon as ever I can get that doctor here, I'll tell you what a brick you've been. I don't dare put it into words yet."

The tears flowed fast down her cheeks. "I've not been a brick. You'll upset me if you say things to me. Do go, please. See, I'm messing up the patient." She wiped a tear off Quong's covering, then with a sudden gesture of disgust crumpled her handkerchief and flung it away from her over the veranda rail.

"My dear—" Trask began.

But there was violence in the gesture with which, both imploring and peremptory, she sped him on his way.

Of all the reasons Bertram Trask had had to be glad or sorry for the *Aoranga's* advent, none held good at the last. Twelve hours had changed the whole of life. He went through the excitement of meeting the first boat, of getting himself

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out to the ship, of encountering commissioner, captain, and doctor, almost stolidly. This was not, as he had expected, the climax. The climax would come when they had turned Quong over to professional hands and could talk things out. The present was nothing: some explanation of the immediate past, some solution of the immediate future, were everything.

There was food for a year's excitement in those decisions which he and Leila would have presently to come to. They must reason like detectives and plan like pioneers. Of course they would have to see what Dr. McFee said. Perhaps the *Aoranga* would remove Quong and leave a substitute. Or Quong might be all right in a day or two. He wouldn't think about it now—either the mystery of the last hours or the uncertainty of the morrow.

With the doctor and a steward established by Quong's side, Trask proceeded to the *Aoranga* to lunch on board with the commissioner. Late in the afternoon he returned. He sought out his wife at once, but could not find her in any of the rooms. The first thing to do, of course, was to get the surgeon's report; but his greatest desire was to discover Leila. It was only his strong suspicion that she had followed McFee and Quong that led him to the banana grove; and when he looked into Quong's little cottage and saw that his wife was not there, he started to return to the house. But the surgeon stepped up quickly and laid a hand on his arm.

"It's very queer," he began.

"Will he pull through?" Trask asked hastily.

"Oh, yes! You must have managed well. But it's a serious case, and he'll not be fit for anything for some time. In fact, unless you have some one to help you out here—I understand he's been your mainstay, so to speak—we'll have to take him along. There's a hospital of sorts in Pago-Pago. You told me this noon, I think, that you didn't know how he got so much of the stuff. It's queer. A Chinaman doesn't generally fill up on foreign drugs. A very pretty case of belladonna poisoning. Humph! It's a pity you didn't try morphin along with the other things."

"Didn't Mrs. Trask tell you we couldn't find the morphin last night? We thought Quong might have taken it."

"I HAVEN'T seen Mrs. Trask since you left. She said she was going to sleep, and she certainly needed it. This fellow hasn't had any morphin of late. I'll stake my word on that. But he has filled himself up with belladonna. You told me, I think, that he had been queer lately?"

"Yes, I've noticed it for a few days. Nothing much."

"Humph!" The doctor looked at Trask, his eye alight with query. "They react very strangely, these yellow boys. Probably didn't show like a white man. But he's been thoroughly poisoned. Good you cleaned him out so quickly. Do you know how much there was on hand?"

"No. But more than he ought to have taken, if he took it all. He had it given him occasionally for his asthma. Mrs. Trask said he had asked for it a few times lately."

"Yes. Well, he must have stolen your whole supply and swilled it regardless, or he wouldn't have come to this pass."

"There was plenty of the stuff there a fortnight ago."

The doctor's jaw dropped. "It's a plain wonder he's alive. Wouldn't be, if he were white. As I say, they don't show, like us. He actually did his work yesterday?"

"Yes; oh, yes. He was queer, but not more so than for the last few days. He kept going."

"God evidently means Chinamen to live," remarked the doctor sententiously. "I remember a case——"

But Trask could wait no longer. "I must find Mrs. Trask. I haven't seen her. She worked like a navvy all night." He passed his hand over his brow. He was beginning to realize how tired he was.

"You had better lie down and get some sleep," McFee advised. "You must have had a hell of a time yourself. I'll see you before I go out to the ship. Perhaps it will be better to get him on board to-night."

TRASK stumbled back through the trellised walk to the house, which was still empty. Leila must have gone down to the seashore.

There, indeed, he discovered her, in one of their favorite shelters. She was booted and spurred, he almost said to himself; dressed, at all events, as he had not seen her for months, in a fresh linen suit, hatted and veiled; gloved, even. He flung himself beside her on the warm sand. Superstition, which merely expects a crisis, had left him. The crisis was there; more complex than anything he had faced since he had thrown down his pen, six months before, across an unfinished page of his unfinished novel.

"Why are you dressed for town?" he asked.

"I thought we had better dine and sleep on the *Aoranga*," she answered simply.

"What did the doctor say to you?"

"Nothing. I haven't seen him. But I am very sure we can't count on Quong."

"No, we can't. I *have* seen the doctor. How did you guess?"

"I didn't guess. I lived through last night. Do you mean to say that you had any hope left?"

"Of Quong? How could I possibly know, my dear child, until the doctor had reported?"

"No, of course not."

"But you were sure?"

Leila Trask flushed. It must have hurt her, he thought, the blood surging so violently as that.

He put his hand on hers. "You were frightened, poor darling. I don't blame you for being desperate. Of course we'll go over to the *Aoranga* for the night. To-morrow is another day. We won't think about it. They are going to move Quong, too."

"Not to-night!" she cried. "We—we can't all go. Some one must stay here with him. To-morrow if they want to. I don't want to be where Quong is. He's got on my nerves after last night. If he's going out to the ship, I'd rather stay here."

"Very well," he said quietly. "I'll see McFee about it. I am sure it can be managed."

She put up her veil and held her handkerchief to her eyes. "Yes, please!" Then, "I've been so frightened," she moaned. "I couldn't sleep this afternoon—I wanted so to get away from that house."

She was thoroughly unnerved, he saw. And the whole ordeal had lasted only twelve hours. Leila was no pioneer. He himself was tired out, but it hadn't made him desperate—or insane. Her state of mind complicated everything—the whole of life to come, in point of fact. She was not, just now, a person with whom to sit considering the future. Devilish luck, in a way. And yet, didn't it simplify, rather than complicate? He had a hundred things to face, but if he faced just one of them, that one disposed of the others for the moment. And after all, mustn't Leila always be faced first? He made his decision very quickly.

"We'll go to Pago-Pago," he said; "perhaps on all the way to Sydney. Then we'll have a lot of time to rest and talk everything out." His own mind was busy wondering what would be the zig-zag course of their return.

"Oh, yes! You are very good to me, Bertram." He kissed her cheek and left it at that.

Trask would have said that he and Leila could not abandon their home—their paradise—without long weeks of preparation. Yet under the empire of Leila's mood they had only to let themselves be taken out to the *Aoranga*. They turned the key on their possessions and walked down to the shore.

True, they left their goods to mildew and decay. The folly of their advent was as nothing to the folly of their departure. Trask wondered; and Leila slept the days away. Their abandonment of their idyll had been somehow a spiritual violence beside which the physical threat of the seasons seemed mild and reparable. Yet a moment had come when there had been nothing else to do. He would never forget that moment.

THEY left Pago-Pago behind them (and Quong), and still Leila could not be talked to. He was desperate, yet he felt she must broach the matter herself. Not until the last night did she speak.

"You've wondered, of course, at my rest cure. It has been just that. I was very, very tired. I got rested long ago, but I didn't want to speak until I was quite myself again—mentally as well as physically, I mean. I've walked all round myself now, and I am perfectly fit to deal with any situation.

"About going back"—she plunged straight in—"I am not sure. Not sure that I ever can. Certainly not for some time to come. I'm sorry; I'm ashamed; I'm not fit to be your wife. I was desperately happy, but I had come to the end. There was no more happiness left in it for me."

"How long had you felt this?"

"It ended very suddenly, just at the last—when we were holding our breaths for the *Aoranga* to come. If I had felt the end coming, if I had realized earlier, of course I should have talked it all out with you. But there wasn't time. You remember our saying, those last days, how stupendous it was—how right we had been. It was just then, I think, that I saw how wrong, in five minutes, it was suddenly going to be. But there wasn't time to say so. I knew that I could never let the *Aoranga* sail away again. And I didn't know how to put it to you. There

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was no time to arrange anything. The only way we could leave was the way we did—suddenly. And that was so mad a move one couldn't plan it. It could be done, but it couldn't be discussed."

"You were restless that last night," he mused, "before Quong was stricken down. But of course, I didn't know——"

"We were both restless," she said. "You, too, waiting for the *Aoranga*. I thought you might break, yourself. But you didn't. I did. It sufficed."

"I wonder"—he was still acutely perplexed—"if you would have broken if we hadn't had that horrible night with Quong. You were nervous and tired, and it broke you down and made everything abnormal; so abnormal that I had to act as I did. Let me tell you now, Leila, how wonderful you were all through the beastly mess. I was afraid at first you weren't going to be any good." He smiled.

"So was I. I wasn't any good. But I was horribly, horribly frightened. Courage came up out of the depths as it does for a life-and-death matter. But you pay for drawing on that secret and forbidden reserve. I was a rag afterward. May you never know what it is to feel like that! Morally, I mean—not physically."

"You took it harder than I, being more sensitive. I was sorry for the poor devil, but I am afraid I was really hit most by the mischance of it for us. It wasn't our fault, and we were doing our best, but it was a nasty business. It was sublime luck, the *Aoranga's* coming. At any other time I should have lost control, too, probably."

"It wouldn't have happened at any other time, of course," she spoke almost listlessly.

"Ah, that is a degree of superstition I never reached."

"I mean, of course, I shouldn't have let it."

He twisted round, scrutinizing her under the dim deck-lamp. Was this his sane Leila? "That's not superstition—that is blasphemy," he contrived to say lightly.

"I MUST have read the book wrong," she went on in her even voice. "Or perhaps I was just misled because he didn't show it much. But somewhere I miscalculated. And I think I shall never get over the fright—never in all my life. When I saw him like that"—she put her hand over her eyes for a moment—"and, oh, worst of all, when you wanted the morphin I had thrown away that very day!"

"You threw the morphin away?"

"Yes, because it was the antidote. I must have been mad. But you see, Quong hadn't showed anything much. I didn't expect anything like what happened. I don't know why I did it."

"Just what did you do, besides throw away the morphin?" He preferred her stark words to his own inferences.

Leila spoke very carefully, aiming at lucidity. "He came to me about devil in the throat. He'd had belladonna, of course." Trask nodded. "The last two or three days I gave him a good deal. I knew it would make him ill. But it didn't seem to, very. So—well, at last I gave him pretty much all there was. It never occurred to me that the stuff would do anything except give him some queer symptoms, so that when the *Aoranga* came the doctor would say he wasn't fit to work. Then either he would have to go or we should. Indeed, if he did, we should. I must have misread the amounts, as I said. I didn't dream there was enough to kill any one. Of course I did intend him to be ill. I was desperate, you see, and there wasn't time to talk. That's all."

Trask got up and paced the deck. After a dozen turns, he stopped in front of her.

"Was it worth murder, dear? No, I take that back. I see what you meant to do. But—the danger of it!" He mopped his forehead where the sweat had started. "Well, Quong's all right, and I'm just as glad McFee dropped off at Pago-Pago. To-morrow morning we make Sydney."

"Yes," she sighed quietly. "I wonder if I shall keep on being afraid in Sydney."

"There's nothing to be afraid of now."

"No; but you never can get rid of a terror like that—never."

They sat in silence for a long time. As Leila rose to go to bed, Trask stopped her. "Do you think there is the slightest chance of your ever wanting to go back?"

"Not after what happened. Up to that awful moment when Quong fell against the pantry door, I thought we should go back some time. But I couldn't now. I am so sorry, Bertram. Shall we ever be so happy anywhere else?"

"Oh, I think so. It's beginning to come straight in my mind. We dared too much; we were presumptuous. That was how I felt, and Quong was—a judgment."

She kissed him good night. "You called him the keeper of the gate, that last day."

"Yes. I thought he kept us in. But it's as it always was. He was the flaming sword to drive us out. We've got to be rational beings, Leila, henceforth. No playing at myth-making."

"Our luck held for a long time."

"My dear child, you don't seem to realize that we're still wallowing in luck. You don't take in—" he drew a deep breath and stopped. Perhaps it was better she never should take in, fully, how the element of the miraculous had stuck by them.

As he undressed and got into his berth, he felt sure that he was more tired than Leila had ever been. Even in these last days he had sometimes promised himself the pleasure of those boasting five minutes at home. Was it a disappointment, or a relief, that he might never boast again? He hardly knew—he was so very tired.

It was her own silver candlestick that squatted on the table. One hand was at her throat. The other clutched an empty bottle.

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UNDER THE SPREADING CHESTNUT TREE

PAT and Mike were broke. Seeing an old Scotchman a short distance ahead of them, they decided to rob the old gentleman. But this was not so easily accomplished; and after a long struggle, during which the old man fought fiercely and almost worsted his opponents, they found to their disgust that he possessed only a dime.

"Begorra," said Mike, "it's sure a good thing he didn't have a quarter or he'd of killed the two of us."

THE burglar, cornered under her bed by the spinster with the silver candlestick and the determined eye, was about to crawl out.

"Never mind apologizing," directed the lady, as she moved toward the door, "and don't move. I want to call brother Jonas to take a look at you. He's laughed at me for twenty years for looking under my bed every night, and now, *at last*, I've got something to show him."

A CUB reporter was very anxious to make good, and though assigned to the "gloom" run, did his best to locate a sparkling feature in stories gleaned from the morgue. One day he turned in the following "copy" to the city editor:

"It had always been the ambition of Mr. and Mrs. John J. Smith that they might die together. One-half of this wish came true last night when Mr. Smith died at his home on North Greeley Avenue."

When the C. E. saw it, he called the cub to his desk, and said sternly:

"My boy, you've overlooked a most startling coincidence in this story."

"What could that be, sir?" groaned the reporter. "I thought I had covered everything."

"They were married on the same day," returned the editor, and resumed his copy reading.

THE census-taker had asked many questions and Mike was tired of answering them.

"And what is your religious belief," the suave census man continued.

"God forgive me, but I'm an atheist," said Mike.

EDITOR'S NOTE—Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped, addressed envelope.

HE CAME of good Methodist stock and they were telling him about the disciples. They told him quite a lot about them, and somehow he didn't seem quite satisfied.

At last he voiced his trouble:

"But were they all Disciples? Weren't there *any* Methodists?"

SHE had just had a narrow escape.

"Gracious," she gasped. "I thought every moment would be my next!"

ISRAEL PALETZKY sold and delivered fresh eggs to a near-by soda dispenser. One day he brought in two dozen eggs in response to an order. Upon counting them, the proprietor of the soda fountain discovered there was an extra egg and offered it back to the aged Jew.

"Oh, dot's all right!" said old Israel. "Neffer mind for chust von egg."

"Well, Izzy, have a drink then."

"All right. I take it a malted milk mit egg."

A SOLDIER of color, recently "over there," had proposed to, and been accepted by his dusky sweetheart. During the marriage ceremony he showed such signs of nervousness that the minister, noticing it, whispered to him, in a voice which could have been heard half a mile:

"What's de mattah wif you Rastus, is yo dun los' yo' ring or sumpin?"

"N-no sah, Mr. Preacher," answered the ex-hero, "but I sho nuff dun los' mah 'thusiasm."

THE timid little butcher had hardly hung up the last of the day's price signs when a gay young lady in high-heeled shoes swished into the shop.

"How much is porterhouse steak this morning?" she asked, in a never-ceasing movement about the shop.

"The price is hanging just above your head," replied the proprietor, and added, apprehensively, "I hope you won't kick at it, ma'am!"

A CADAVEROUS, sallow Georgia "Cracker" dropped in at the village general store, asked for his mail, loafed around a while, then inquired hopefully about a "sugar bar'l." Upon being told that an emptied one had been placed in an adjoining shed, he repaired thence and was busy for some time filling up on 'lasses sugar.

Finally, gorged to repletion, and with a considerable layer adhering to his face, he sat down in the sun with his back against a convenient wall and went to sleep. Shortly, countless flies swarmed over his face, unmolested. Soon a yellow-jacket declared itself in on the feast. The pressure of the flies angered the yellow-jacket, which retaliated in the only way it knew how.

The reclining "Cracker" languidly swept his hand over his face with a fan-like motion, and said: "Now, gol-dern yo! Just for that ye all got to git off."

A SCOTTISH gentleman on a trip to New Orleans went to see his first horse-race. He was feeling very reckless, and decided to risk one dollar, choosing a forty-to-one shot, as that looked like the largest percentage of gain. By a miracle his horse won, and upon handing his ticket to the bookmaker, he received forty dollars.

"Do I get all this for my dollar?" he asked. Upon being assured that he did, he exclaimed, "Hoots! how long has this been going on?"

"DID you really call this gentleman an old fool last night?" asked the judge.

The prisoner tried hard to collect his thoughts.

"Well, the more I look at him, the more likely it seems that I did," he replied.

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"What! My Car?"

"Yes! Skidded—and it's up to you. You failed to provide the chauffeur with Tire Chains. Only good luck saved your wife from paying the supreme penalty for your negligence. She's on the way to the hospital, painfully injured, but the doctor thinks she'll pull through."

How strange it is that disaster must come to some men before they realize that all tires will skid on wet pavements and muddy roads when not equipped with Chains.

The time to provide against accidents is before they happen. Don't wait until after the first skid. Put Weed Chains on all four tires at the first indication of slippery going and you will have quadruple protection against injury, death, car damage and lawsuits.

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The Rider of Golden Bar

(*Continued from page 12*)

Smack went the whip. The mule tucked his tail, shook his mean head, and tried to jump through his collar. The brake-lever shot forward under the shove of the girl's straightened right leg. The sensible off mule threw his head to the left to ease the hard drag on his mouth as the girl swayed back on the near rein. The near mule, hearing the slither of the locked wheels behind him, and with his windpipe bent like a bow and his chin forced back to his chest, decided that fighting would avail him nothing and quieted at once.

"Regular driver, that girl," Billy said approvingly. "It ain't every woman can drive a pair of those big freight mules. I never knew she was like that."

"Lots of things you dunno," Riley hastened to say. "You didn't even know she was pretty."

Billy hopped across the sidewalk and ran out into the middle of Main Street. The mules, hard held, slid to a halt. Billy scooped up the package that had fallen from behind the seat and hurried up to the buckboard.

"Your tarp's slipped a little, ma'am," said he, stowing away the package without raising his eyes to Miss Walton, who was leaning over the back of the seat. "I'll tie it fast."

Not till the tarpaulin was fastened to his complete satisfaction did he look up. Then he realized that Riley Tyler had not told half the truth about Hazel Walton's eyes. True, they were big and black and soft, but they were deep too, deep as cool rock pools, and they looked at you steadily with a straight look that somehow made you wish that you had been a better boy.

Queer that he hadn't noticed this attribute before. But at none of the two or three times he had passed the girl on Golden Bar's Main Street had she impressed him in the least. He could not have described her to save his life. Perhaps it was because he had not looked into her eyes before to-day. But he wasted no time thinking about that. He kept right on looking into her eyes.

"You don't come in town very often," was his sufficiently inane observation.

"Not very often," said she, and smiled.

Yes, there were the teeth. And weren't they white! He didn't know when he had seen such white teeth. And her mouth had a dimple near one corner. Now the dimple was gone. He wished it would appear once more.

"DO IT again," he found himself saying like a fool.

She wrinkled her pretty forehead at him. "What?"

"Smile," he said, with a boldness that surprised himself.

It surprised Hazel Walton, surprised her so that she jerked round to the front, "kissed" to the mules and drove away without a word.

Billy stood quite still in the middle of Main Street, with his hat off, and looked after her a moment. Then he pulled on the hat with a jerk and returned to his packing case.

"What did she say to you?" Riley wanted to know.

"None of your business," was the ungracious reply.

"She left you sudden sort of," persisted Riley. "And why did you stand still in the middle of the street and look after her so forlorn and long?"

"I wasn't lookin' more than ten seconds," denied Billy, jarred off his balance for once in his life.

"Shucks, I had time to roll a cigaret, and smoke it to the butt while you stood there nailed to the earth. Yeah. Tell you, Bill, you don't wanna let your feelings give you away so much. Bad business that is. Somebody's bound to pick your pocket forty ways. Y'oughta play poker more. That would teach you self-control."

"Bluh," grunted Billy. "Think you're smart, don't you?"

"I KNOW I am," returned Riley, crossing one knee over the other and diddling his foot up and down to the thin accompaniment of a tinkling spur-rowel. "I got eyes, I have. I can see through a piece of glass most generally. Oh, mush and milk, love's young dream, and when shall we meet again."

"Aw, hell, shut up!" urged Billy, and shoved his friend off the packing-case and went elsewhere hastily.

Riley first swore, then laughed and reseated himself on the case. Jack Murray, passing by, stopped and sneered openly. It was obvious that Jack was in liquor.

"He don't care how much he picks on you, does he?" observed Jack.

Riley Tyler did not move hand or foot. But a subtle change took place. Iron turning into steel undergoes such a metamorphosis. The sixth sense of an observing old gentleman across the street and directly in line with Jack Murray informed its owner of the sudden chill in the air. The observing old gentleman, whose name was Wildcat Simms, oozed backward through a doorway into the Old Hickory saloon.

"Why are you walking like a crab, Wildcat?" queried his friend the bartender.

"Because Jack Murray is talking to Riley Tyler."

The bartender, wise in his generation, was well able to fill in the rest for himself. He joined the old gentleman behind a window at one side of the line of fire.

Riley Tyler, meanwhile, was fixedly regarding Jack Murray.

"Meaning?" said Riley Tyler.

Jack Murray came right out into the open. "Ain't you able to stand up for yourself no more?"

There it was—the deliberate insult. Followed then movement so swift no eye could trace it. But Riley's gun caught. Jack Murray's didn't. When the smoke began to wreathe upward in the windless air, Jack Murray was calmly walking away up the street and Riley Tyler was hunched across the packing-case. Blood was running down the boards of the packing-case and seeping through the cracks in the sidewalk.

Billy Wingo was the fourth man to reach Riley. The boy, for he was not yet twenty-one, had been turned over on his back on the sidewalk. He was unconscious. Samson, the Green-Front Store owner, was bandaging a wound in Riley's neck.

"Lucky," observed Samson, "just missed the jugular."

"Where else is he shot?" queried Billy, his eyes on the blood-soaked front of Riley's shirt.

"Right shoulder," Samson informed him.

"I heard three shots," said Billy. "Two was close together but the last one was maybe ten seconds later."

"I only found the two holes," declared Samson.

But when Billy and another man picked up Riley to carry him to the hotel, Billy found where the third shot had gone. It had penetrated Riley's back on the left side, bored between two ribs, missed the wall of the stomach by a hair and made its exit an inch above the waistband of the trousers.

The marshal, who had seen the crowd going into the hotel, arrived as Billy and Samson were making Riley as comfortable as possible on a cot in one of the hotel rooms.

The marshal, whose surname being Herring was commonly called "Red," thrust out a lower lip as he surveyed the man on the bed.

"Even break, I hear," said the marshal.

Billy set him right at once. "You heard wrong, Red. Riley's gun caught. I found where the sight had slipped through a crack in the leather. Besides, Riley was plugged in the back after he was down. Do you call that an even break?"

"WELL, no," admitted Red Herring, who was inclined to be just, if being just did not interfere with his line of duty. "Anybody see it besides you?"

"I didn't see it a-tall. I didn't have to. I heard the shots—two close together and one a good ten seconds later. Oh, Riley was plugged after he was down and out, all right enough. Besides, Riley was lying across his gun-hand when he was picked up, Samson says."

"That's right," nodded Samson.

"Jack was a little previous, sort of," frowned the marshal.

"You think so," said Billy sarcastically. "Maybe you're right."

"Well, I can't do a thing," said the marshal. "I didn't see it. And these fray-cases will happen sometimes."

"Nobody's asking you to do anything," said Billy. "I'm looking after this."

"Now don't you go pickin' a fight with anybody," urged the marshal, instantly perceiving his line of duty. "Judge Driver is dead against these promiscuous shootings."

"Judge Driver can go to hell," Billy said with heat. "What's this here but a promiscuous shooting, I'd like to know? And I don't see you arrestin' anybody for it. You said you couldn't."

"I didn't see this one, and besides Riley ain't been killed and no complaint has been made," defended the marshal, who was no logician. "But where a feller says he's gonna attend to somebody, that shows premeditation and malice aforethought which both of 'em is against the statute as made and provided in such cases."

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"How you do run on," commented Billy.

But the Red Herring lacked a sense of humor. Heavy of soul, he frowned heavily at Billy.

"You go slow," was his fishy advice.

"Be careful and otherwise refrain from violence," observed Billy, whose English became better as his temper grew worse. "I grasp your point of view," he added gravely. "But I don't like it. Not for a minute I don't. I'll do as I think best. I'd rather, really."

"Don't you go startin' nothin' you can't finish," said the marshal, lost in a maze of words. "I don't want to have to arrest you."

"I don't want you to have to either," Billy averred warmly. "Arrestin' me would surely interfere with my plans. Yeah."

"A sheriff-elect had oughta set a good example," argued the marshal.

Riley Tyler rolled his head from side to side. He muttered incoherently. The men about the cot turned to look down at him. Then he said, speaking distinctly:

"He shot me after I was down."

Billy Wingo raised his eyes and stared at the marshal.

"How's that, umpire?" said Billy.

"He's raving," snapped the marshal.

"A man speaks the truth when he's thataway," rebuked Billy. "I'm going to see about this."

But the marshal blocked his way. "I told you——" he began.

"Get out of my way!" directed Billy, his gray eyes ablaze.

The marshal got. After all, he had no specific orders to prevent a meeting between Jack Murray and Billy Wingo. Let Jack look out for himself. No doubt Rafe and sundry other of his friends would be annoyed, but it couldn't be helped. The marshal betook himself hurriedly to the back room of the Freedom Saloon.

Billy, coldly purposeful, made a round of the saloons first. In none of them did he find his man or news of him. Finally, from the stage company's hostler tending a cripple outside the company corral, he learned that Jack had left town.

"Which he went surging off down the Hillsville trail," said the hostler, "like he hadn't a minute to lose. He told me he was going to Hillsville."

"Told you?" Surprisedly.

"Yes, told me, sure. 'If the marshal wants me,' says he, as he loped past, 'tell him I've gone to Hillsville.' "

HERE was an odd thing. Jack Murray knew where he stood with the powers that were, and consequently knew that the marshal would not want him for the shooting. Yet here was Jack Murray not only leaving town hastily as though he feared capture, but taking pains to leave word where he was going! The two facts did not fit. True, a gentleman seeking to mislead possible pursuers might lie as to where he was going. In which case such a gentleman would not take a trail like the Hillsville trail—a trail visible from Golden Bar for almost five miles in both directions. But if a person wished to be pursued——

"I think I can see his dust still," said the hostler helpfully, pointing toward the spot where the Hillsville trail entered a grove of pines five miles out.

"I think I see it too," declared Billy grimly, and went hurriedly to the hotel for his rifle and saddle.

Hazel Walton, jogging along the homeward way, was overtaken by a horseman. He nodded and called, " 'Lo," as he galloped by. She returned his greeting with careful courtesy. But she scowled and made a little face after his retreating back. She did not like Jack Murray. She never had. The man had repelled her from the moment she first set eyes on him.

IT IS human nature for one to take an interest in the movement of a person one dislikes. Hazel wondered where Jack Murray was riding so fast. For it was a hot day. Her wonder grew when, twenty minutes after he had passed from sight, she perceived by the hoofmarks that he had left the trail and turned into a dry wash. She knew that the wash led nowhere, that it was a blind alley, a cul-de-sac ending in a rock-strewn, unclimbable slope that was the base of Block Mountain. This wash was a good two miles beyond where the trail entered the grove of pines five miles out of Golden Bar.

Beyond the wash the trail wound up the side of a hill. At the crest of the hill the off mule picked up a stone. Hazel set the brake, tied the reins to the felloe of a wheel and jumped to the ground. The stone was in a near fore, and jammed tight. After ten minutes hard hammering and levering with her jack-knife she had the stone out.

As she released the foot from between her knees and straightened her back, her gaze swept along the back trail. She saw only sections of trail till it passed beyond the grove of pines five miles out of town. The grove was now three miles behind her. The wash into which Jack Murray had ridden was distant not half a mile. The land on either side of the wash had once been burnt over and had grown up in brush and scraggly jack-pine.

Of the pines and spruce that had once covered the ground surrounding the wash but one tall gray stub remained. The eye of the beholder was naturally drawn to this salient characteristic of the landscape. She saw more than the stub. She saw Jack Murray's horse tied to its bole. There was something queer about the horse's head. Whereas Jack Murray's horse when it passed her on the trail had been a sorrel of a solid color, the head was now whitey-gray.

Hazel was not of an abnormally inquisitive nature, but that a horse's head should change color within the space of half an hour was enough to make any one ask questions. Ever since she and her uncle had come to realize that some one was rustling their cattle neither of them ever left home without field-glasses. Hazel pulled her pair from beneath the seat cushion and focused them on the odd-looking horse.

"Why, it's a flour sack over the horse's head!" she exclaimed. "They say a horse won't whinny if you cover his head. I wonder why Jack doesn't want him to whinny. And *where* is Jack?"

Two minutes later she found Jack. He was lying on his stomach in the brush behind an outcrop. The outcrop overlooked the trail. Jack's rifle was poked out in front of him. It was only too obvious that Jack was also overlooking the trail. Why?

A few minutes later that question was answered by the sudden appearance of a rider at a bend of the trail a mile back. Jack Murray must have glimpsed the rider at the same time, for Hazel saw him snuggle down like a hare in its form, and alter slightly the position of his rifle, although the rider was not yet within accurate shooting range. With a gasp she recognized the rider on the trail by his high-crowned white hat: only one man in Golden Bar wore such a hat and that man was Billy Wingo. Instantly she recalled what folks were saying of Jack Murray since it had become positively known that the party nomination for sheriff had gone to Billy Wingo, that Jack Murray "had it in" for Billy, that he had made threats more or less vague, and that he had taken to brooding over his fancied wrongs. She realized that the threats had crystallized into action, and that this was an ambush.

She knew that Billy would be masked by a certain belt of trees before he traveled another thirty yards, not to emerge into view again till he topped a rise of ground about a thousand yards from the base of the hill on which she stood. It was a certainty that Jack would not risk a shot till his enemy had crossed the rise of ground. If Hazel could only reach the top of the rise first—

Hazel popped up into the seat of the buckboard as Billy reached the belt of trees. It has been shown that Hazel Walton was a good driver, and she needed every atom of her skill to turn the buckboard in the narrow trail without smashing a wheel against the rocks that some apparently malign agency had seen fit to strew about at that particular spot. The near mule, devil that he was, when he found that he was no longer headed for home, stuck out his lower lip and front legs and balked.

THIS was unwise of the near mule. He should have chosen a more opportune moment. Hazel had no time to reason with him. She set her teeth, slacked the reins, opened her jack-knife and jabbed an inch and a half of the longer blade into the mule's swelling hip.

It is doubtful whether the recalcitrant mule ever moved faster in his life. The forward spring he gave as the steel perforated his thick hide almost snapped the doubletree. Hazel, her toes hooked under the iron foot-rail, poured the leather into the off mule.

She made no attempt to guide her galloping team. She did not need to. She barely felt their mouths, but ever she kept her whip going, and the mules laid their bellies to the ground and flew down that hill like frightened jack-rabbits. And like a rubber ball the buckboard bounced behind them.

Hazel knew that Jack Murray behind his outcrop must hear the thunder of the racing hoofs, the rattle of the swooping buckboard. Half-way down the hill she lost her hat. Promptly every hairpin she possessed lost its grip and her hair came down. In a dark and rippling cloud it streamed behind her.

"Keep your feet, mules!" she gritted through her locked teeth. "Keep your feet, for God's sake!"

And they kept their footing among the rolling stones, or rather a merciful Providence kept it for them. For that hill was commonly a hill to be negotiated with careful regard to every bump and hollow.

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Hazel's life was in jeopardy every split second, but so was another life, and it was of this other life she was thinking. Reach that white-hatted rider she must before he came within thousand-yard range of the man behind the outcrop.

Within thousand-yard range, yes. Jack Murray's reputation with the long arm was of territorial proportions. He had made in practise, hunting and open competition almost unbelievable scores. Given anything like a fair shot and it would be hard if he could not hit an object the size of Billy Wingo. All this Hazel Walton knew, and her heart stood still at the thought. But she was of the breed that fights to the last breath and a gasp beyond.

She breathed a little prayer, dropped her right hand on the reins ahead of her left and turned the team round the curve at the foot of the hill as neatly as any stage-driver could have done it. That they swung round on a single wheel did not matter in the least. Beyond the curve one of the front wheels struck a rock that lifted Hazel a foot in the air and shot every single package and the tarpaulin out of the buckboard.

AND now the road passed the wash and ran straight for more than half a mile till it disappeared over the rise of ground. Throughout the whole distance it was under the sharpshooting rifle of the man behind the outcrop.

As she clung to the pitching buckboard and plied the whip she speculated on the probability of Jack Murray firing on her. He must realize her purpose. He had been called many things, but fool was not one of them. He might even shoot her. She recalled dim stories of Jack Murray's ruthlessness and grim singleness of purpose.

"Bound to get what he wants, no matter how," men had said of him.

Four hundred yards from the curve where the buckboard had so nearly upset, a Winchester cracked in the rear. The near mule staggered, tried to turn a somersault, and collapsed in a heap of sprawling legs and outthrust neck. The off mule fell on top of his mate, and Hazel catapulted over the dashboard and landed head first on top of the off mule.

The off mule regained his feet with a snort and a lurch, in the process throwing Hazel into a squaw-bush. Dizzy and more than a little shaken, that young woman scrambled back into the trail and feverishly set about unhitching the mule.

She heard a yell from the direction of the outcrop above the wash. Fingers busy with the breast-strap snap, she looked back to see a man hurdle the outcrop and plunge toward her through the brush.

"Wait!" he bawled. "Wait!"

Her reply to this command was to spring to the tail of the mule and shout to him to back. He backed. She twitched both trace cockeyes out of the singletree hooks (she was using the wagon harness that day), tossed the traces over the mule's back and ran round in front to unbuckle the dead mule's reins.

"Halt or I shoot!"

She giggled hysterically. How could she halt when she had not yet started? She freed the second billet, tore the reins through the terrets, and bunched the reins anyhow in her left hand. He was a tall mule, but she swarmed up his shoulder by means of collar and hames, threw herself

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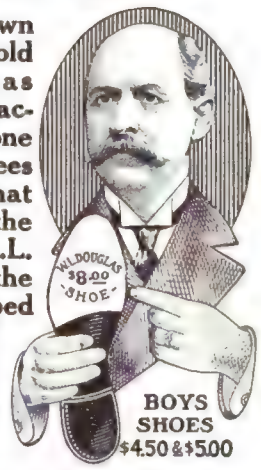

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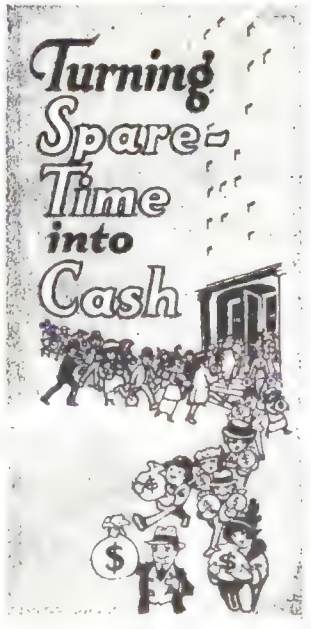

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across his withers and besought him at the top of her lungs to "Go! Go! Go!"

He went. He went as the saying is, like a bat out of hades. Hazel slipped tailward from the withers, settled herself with knees clinging high, and whanged him over the rump with the ends of the reins. He hardly needed any encouragement. Her initial cry had been more than enough.

The man in the brush stopped. He raised his rifle to his shoulder, looked through the sights at the galloping mule, then lowered the firearm and uttered a heartfelt oath. It had at last been borne in upon his darkened soul that he possibly had made a mistake. Instead of shooting the mule, in the first place, he might better have relinquished his plan of ambush and gone his way in peace. There were other places than Golden Bar, plenty of them, where an enterprising young man could get along and bide his time to square accounts with his enemy.

But the killing of the mule had fairly pushed the bridge over. It was, not to put a nice face on it, an attack on a woman. He might just as well have shot Hazel—better, in fact. She had undoubtedly recognized him. Those Waltons both carried field-glasses, he had heard.

"I'll get the mule anyhow," he muttered. "That'll put a crimp in her."

He dropped on one knee between two bushes, took a quick sight at the mule's barrel six inches behind the girl's leg and pulled trigger. Over and over rolled the mule, and over and over a short foot in advance of his kicking hoofs rolled Hazel. Luckily she was not stunned and she rolled clear. She scrambled to her feet and set off up the trail as fast as her shaking legs would carry her.

"Damn her!" cursed Jack Murray, notching up his back sight. "I'd oughta drop her! She's askin' for it, the hussy!"

HIS itching finger trembled on the trigger, but he did not pull. Reluctantly, slowly he lowered the Winchester and set the hammer on safety. The drink was dying out in him. Against his will he rendered the girl the tribute of unwilling admiration. "Whatsa use? She's got too much nerve; but maybe I can get him still."

On her part the girl pelted on up the rise, stumbled at the top and came down heavily, tearing her dress, bruising her knees and thoroughly scratching the palms of her hands. But she scrambled to her feet and went on at a hobbling run, for she saw below her, rising the grade at a sharp trot, the rider of the white hat.

Now she was waving her arms and trying to shout a warning, though her voice stuck in her throat and she was unable to utter more than a low croak.

Billy Wingo pulled up at sight of the wild apparition that was Hazel Walton. But the check was momentary. He clapped home the spurs and hustled his horse into a gallop. He and Hazel came together literally, forty yards below the crest. The girl seized his stirrup to save herself from falling, and burst into hysterical tears.

"The Rider of Golden Bar,"
will be continued in the June
EVERYBODY'S.

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IF WINTER COMES

(*Continued from page 72*)

headlong as though malignity, bitter and wanton, had loosed a savage bolt.

He arranged to spend the night at the Officers' Rest House near Victoria station. Arriving about nine and disinclined for food, he strolled up to St. James's Park and walked about a little, then back to the station and into the yard to buy a paper. He stood on a street refuge to let by a cab coming out of the station. As it passed he saw its occupants—two women; and one saw him—Nona! Of all incredible things, Nona!

She stopped the cab and he hurried after it.

"Nona!"

"Marko!"

She said: "I'm hurrying to Euston to catch a train. Tony's mother is with me."

He could not see her well in the dim light, but he thought she looked terribly pale and fatigued, and her manner odd. He said: "I'm just going back. But you, Nona? I thought you were in France?"

"I was—this morning. I only came over to-day."

How funny her voice was. "Nona, you look ill. You sound ill. What's up? Is anything wrong?"

She said: "Oh, Marko, Tony's killed."

"Nona!"

That came careering headlong as though malignity, bitter and wanton, has loosed a savage bolt . . .

Tybar killed! The cab was away and he was standing there. Tybar killed! She had said they were hurrying to Scotland, to Tony's home. Tybar killed! He was getting in people's way. He went rather uncertainly to the railings bounding the pavement where he stood and leaned against them and stared across into the dim cavern of the station yard. Tybar dead . . ."

* * *

At a much later date Nona told Sabre of Tony's death:

"It was in that advance of ours. Just before Vimy Ridge. At Arras. Marko, he was shot down leading his men. He wouldn't let them take him away. He was cheering them on. And then he was hit again. He was terribly wounded. Oh, terribly! They got him down to the clearing station. They didn't think he could possibly live. But you know how wonderful he always was. Even in death that extraordinary spirit of his. They got him to Boulogne. I was there, and I heard quite by chance."

"You saw him, Nona?"

SHE nodded. "Just before he died. He couldn't speak. But he'd been speaking just before I came. He left a message with the nurse."

She drew a long breath. "Marko, the nurse gave me the message. She thought it was for me—and it wasn't."

She wiped her eyes. "He was watching us. I know he knew she was telling me, and his eyes—you know that mocking kind of look they used to have? Poor Tony! It was there. He died like that. Marko, you know I'm very glad he just had his old mocking way while he died. Now it's over, I'm glad. I wouldn't have had him sorry and unhappy just when he was dying. He was just utterly untouched by anything all his life, not to be judged as ordinary people are judged, and I know perfectly well he'd have wished to go out just his mocking, careless self to the last. He was utterly splendid. All that was between us, that was nothing once the war came. Always think kindly of him, Marko."

Sabre said: "I do. I've never been able but to admire him."

She said: "Every one did. Poor Tony! Brave Tony!"

XI

ON THE following morning he crossed to France, there to take up again that strange identity in whose occupancy his own self was held in abeyance, waiting his return. Seven months passed before he returned to that waiting identity, and he resumed it then permanently—done with the war.

The tremendous fighting of 1917—his participation in the war—his tenancy of the strange personality caught up in the enormous machinery of it all—ended for him in the great break through of the Hindenburg Line in November. On top of a recollection of sudden shock, then of whirling giddiness in which he was conscious of some enormous violence going on but could not feel it—like (as he afterward thought) beginning to come to in the middle of a tooth extraction under gas—on the top of these and of extraordinary things and scenes and people he could not at all understand came some one saying:

"Well, it's good-by to the war for you, old man."

He knew that he was aware—and somehow for some time had been aware—that he was in a cot in a ship. He said: "I got knocked out, didn't I?"

Some one was telling him some interminable story about some one being wounded in the shoulder and in the knee. He said, and his voice appeared to him to be all jumbled up and thick: "Well, I don't care a damn."

Some one laughed.

Years—or minutes—after this he was talking to a nurse. He said: "What did some one say to me about it being good-by to the war for me?"

The nurse smiled. "Well, poor thing, you've got it rather badly in the knee, you know."

He puzzled over this. Presently he said: "Where are we?"

The nurse bent across the cot and peered through the port; then beamed down on him.

"England!"

She said: "Aren't you glad? *What's* the matter?"

His face was contracted in intensity of thought; extraordinary thought; he felt the most extraordinary premonition of something disastrous awaiting him; there was in his mind, meaninglessly, menacingly, over and over again: "Good luck have thee with thine honor, and thy right hand shall show thee terrible things."

"Terrible things . . ."

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PART IV

Chapter One

Hapgood Resumes His Story

SAID Hapgood—that garrulous Hapgood, solicitor, who first in this book spoke of Sabre to a mutual friend—said Hapgood, seated in the comfortable study of his flat, to that same friend, staying the night—

Well, now, old man, about Sabre. Well, I tell you it's a funny business—a dashed funny business, the position old Puzzlehead Sabre has got himself into. Of course you, with your coarse and sordid instincts, will say it's just what it appears to be and a very old story at that. Whereas to me, with my exquisitely delicate susceptibilities— No, don't throw that, old man. Sorry. I'll be serious. What I want just to kick off with is that you know as well as I do that I've never been the sort of chap who wept he knows not why; I've never nursed a tame gazelle or any of that sort of stuff. In fact I've got about as much sentiment in me as there is in a pound of lard. But when I see this poor beggar Sabre as he is now, and when I hear him talk as he talked to me about his position last week, and when I see how gray and ill he looks, hobbling about on his old stick, well, I tell you, old man I get—well, look here, here it is from the Let Go.

Look here, this is April, April, 1918, by all that's Hunnish—dashed nearly four years of this infernal war. Well, old Sabre got knocked out in France just about five months ago, back in November. He copped it twice—shoulder and knee. Shoulder nothing much; knee pretty bad. Thought they'd have to take his leg off, one time. Thought better of it, thanks be; patched him up; discharged him from the army; and sent him home—very groggy, only just able to put the bad leg to the ground, crutches, and its going to be a stick and a bit of a limp all his life. Poor old Puzzlehead. Think yourself lucky you were a Conscientious Objector, old man—Oh, damn you, that hurt.

Very well. That's as he was when I first saw him again. Just making first attempts in the stick-and-limp stage, poor beggar. That was back in February. Early in February. Mark the date, as they say in the detective stories. I can't remember what the date was, but never you mind. You just mark it. Early in February, two months ago. There was good old me down in Tidborough on business—good old me doing the heavy London solicitor in a provincial town—they always put down a red carpet for me at the station, you know; rather decent, don't you think?—and remembering about old Sabre having been wounded and discharged, blew into Fortune, East & Sabre's (business wasn't with them this time) for news of him.

Of course he wasn't there. Saw old Fortune and the man Twyning and found them in regard to Sabre about as genial and communicative as a maiden aunt over a married sister's new dress. Old Fortune looking like a walking pulpit in a thundercloud—I should say he'd make about four of me round the equator; and mind you, a chap stopped me in the street the other day and offered me a job as Beefeater outside a moving-picture show: yes, fact, I was wretchedly annoyed about it—and the man Twyning with a lean and hungry look

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like Cassius, or was it Judas Iscariot? Well, like Cassius out of a job or Judas Iscariot in the middle of one, anyway. That's Twyning's sort. Chap I never cottoned onto a bit. They'd precious little to say about Sabre. Sort of handed out the impression that he'd been out of the business so long that really they weren't much in touch with his doings. Rather rotten, I thought it, seeing that the poor beggar had done his bit in the war and done it pretty thoroughly, too. They said that really they hardly knew when he'd be fit to get back to work again; not just yet a while anyway. And, yes, he was at home over at Penny Green, so far as they knew—in the kind of tone that they didn't know much and cared less: at least that was the impression they gave me; only my fancy, I dare say, as the girl said when she thought the soldier sat a bit too close to her in the tram.

Well, I'd nothing to do till my train pulled out in the afternoon, so I hopped it over to Penny Green Garden Home on the railway and walked down to old Sabre's to scoop a free lunch off him. Found him a bit down the road from his house trying out this game leg of his. By Jove, he was no end bucked to see me. Came bounding along, dot and carry one, and beaming all over his old phiz, and wrung my honest hand as if he was Robinson Crusoe discovering Man Friday on a desert island. I know I'm called Popular Percy by thousands who can only admire me from afar, but I tell you old Sabre fairly overwhelmed me. And talk! He simply jabbered. I said, "By Jove, Sabre, one would think you hadn't met any one for a month the way you're unbelting the sacred rites of welcome." He laughed and said, "Well, you see, I'm a bit tied to a post with this leg of mine."

"How's the wife?" said I.

"She's fine," said he. "You'll stay to lunch? I say, Hapgood, you will stay to lunch, won't you?"

I told him that's what I'd come for; and he seemed no end relieved—so relieved that I think I must have cocked my eye at him or something, because he said in an apologetic sort of way, "I mean, because my wife will be delighted. It's a bit dull for her nowadays, only me and always me, crawling about more or less helpless."

It struck me afterward—oh, well, never mind that now. I said, "I suppose she's making no end of a fuss over you now, hero of the war, and all that sort of thing?"

"Oh, rather!" says old Sabre, and a minute or two later, as if he hadn't said it heartily enough, "Oh, rather. Rather, I should think so."

II

WELL, we staggered along into the house, old Sabre talking away like a sodawater bottle just uncorked, and he took me into a room on the ground floor where they'd put up a bed for him, him not being able to do the stairs, of course. "This is my —my den," he introduced it, "where I sit about and read and try to do a bit of work."

There didn't look to be much signs of either that I could see, and I said so. And old Sabre, who'd been hobbling about the room in a rather uncomfortable sort of way, exclaimed suddenly, "I say, Hapgood, it's absolutely ripping having you here talking like this. I never can settle down

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properly in this room and I've got a jolly place up-stairs where all my books and things are."

"Let's go up then," I said.

"I can't get up."

"Well, man alive, I can get you up. Come on. Let's go."

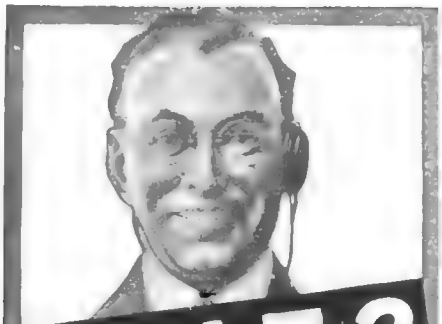
He seemed to hesitate for some reason I didn't understand. "It's got to be in a chair," he said. "It's a business. I wonder—" That kind of thing, as though it was something he oughtn't to do. "But it would be fine," he said. "I've not been up for days. I could show you some of my history I'm going to take up again one of these days—one of these days," said he with his nut rather wrinkled up. And then suddenly, "Come on, let's go!"

At the door he called out, "I say, you Jinkses!" and two servant girls came tumbling out rather as if they were falling out of a trap and each trying to fall out first. "I say," old Sabre says, "Mistress not back yet, is she?" and when they told him no, "Well, d'you think you'd like to get me up-stairs on that infernal chair?" he says.

"Oh, we *will*, sir," and they got out one of those invalid chairs and started to lift him up. Course I wanted to take one end but they wouldn't hear of it. "If you please, we like carrying the master, sir," and all that kind of thing; and they fussed him in and fiddled with his legs, snapping at one another for being rough as if they were the two women taking their disputed baby up to old Solomon.

They'd scarcely got on to the stairs when the front door opened and in walks his wife. My word, I thought they were going to drop him. She says in a voice as though she was biting a chip off an ice block, "Mark, is it *really* necessary—" Then she saw me and took her teeth out of the ice. "Oh, it's Mr. Hapgood, isn't it? How very nice. Staying to lunch of course? Do let's come into the drawing-room." Very nice and affable. I always rather liked her. And we went along, I being rather captured and doing the polite in my well-known matinée idol manner, you understand; and I heard old Sabre saying, "Well, let me out of the damned thing, can't you? Help me out of the damned thing;" and presently hobbled in and joined us, and soon after that lunch, exquisitely cooked and served and all very nice too.

WELL, as I say, old man, I always rather liked his wife. I—always—rather—liked her. But somehow as we went on through lunch, and then on after that, I didn't like her quite so much. Not—quite—so—much. I don't know. Have you ever seen a woman unpicking a bit of sewing? Always look rather angry with it, I suppose because it's got to be unpicked. They sort of *flip* the threads out, as much as to say "*Come* out of it, drat you. *That's* you, drat you." Well, that was the way she spoke to old Sabre. Sort of snipped off the end of what he was saying and left it hanging, if you follow me. That was the way she spoke to him when she did speak to him. But for the most part they hardly spoke to one another at all. I talked to her, or I talked to him, but the conversation never got triangular. Whenever it threatened to, *snip*, she'd have his corner off and leave him floating. Tell you what it was, old man, I jolly soon saw that the



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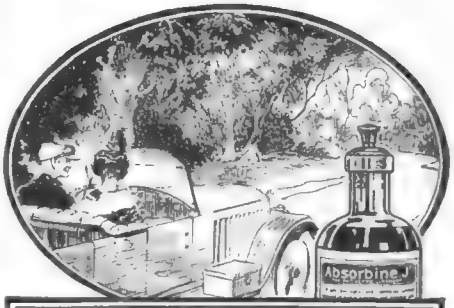

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reason old Sabre was so jolly anxious for me to stay to lunch was because meals without dear old me or some other chatty intellectual were about as much like a feast of reason and a flow of soul as a vinegar bottle and a lukewarm potato on a cold plate. Similarly with the exuberance of his greeting of me. I hate to confess it, but it wasn't so much splendid old me he had been so delighted to see as any old body to whom he could unloose his tongue without having the end of his nose snipped off.

Mind you, I don't mean that he was cowed and afraid to open his mouth in his wife's presence. Nothing a bit like that. What I got out of it was that he was starved, intellectually starved, mentally starved, starved of the good old milk of human kindness—*that's* what I mean. Everything he put up she threw down, not because she wanted to snub him, but because she either couldn't or wouldn't take the faintest interest in anything that interested him. Course she may have had jolly good reason. I daresay she had. Still, there it was, and it seemed rather rotten to me. I didn't like it. Damn it, the chap only had one decent leg under the table and an uncommonly tired-looking face above it, and I felt rather sorry for him.

III

AFTER lunch I said, "Well, now, old man, what about going up to this room of yours and having a look at this monumental history?" Saw him shoot a glance in his wife's direction, and he said, "Oh, no, not now, Hapgood. Never mind now." And his wife said, "Mark, what *can* there be for Mr. Hapgood to see up there? It's too ridiculous. I'm sure he doesn't want to be looking at lesson books."

I said, "Oh, but I'd like to. In fact I insist. None of your backing out at the last minute, Sabre. I know your little games."

Sort of carried it off like that, d'you see; knowing perfectly well the old chap was keen on going up, and seeing perfectly clearly that for some extraordinary reason his wife stopped him going up.

By Jove, he was pleased, I could see he was. We got in the maids and upped him, to a room he used to sleep in I gathered, and up there he hobbled about, taking out this book and dusting up that book, and fiddling over his table, and looking out of the window, for all the world like an evicted emigrant restored to the home of his fathers.

He said, "Forgive me, old man, just a few minutes; you know I haven't been up here for over three weeks."

I said, "Why the devil haven't you then?"

"Oh, well," says he. "Oh, well, it makes a business in the house, you know, heaving me up."

Well, that didn't cut any ice, you know, seeing that I'd seen the servants rush to the job as if they were going to a school treat. It was perfectly clear to me that the reason he was kept out of the room was because his wife didn't want him being lugged up there; and for all I knew never had liked him being there and now was able to stop it.

However his wife was his funeral, not mine, and I said nothing and presently he settled himself down and we began talking.

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At least he did. He's got some ideas, old Sabre has. He didn't talk about the war. He talked a lot about the effect of the war, on people and on institutions, and that sort of guff. Devilish deep, devilishly interesting. I won't push it on to you. You're one of those soulless, earth-clogged natures.

Tell you one thing, though, just to give you an idea of the way he's been developing all these years. He talked about how sickened he was with all this stuff in the papers and in the pulpits about how the nation, in this war, is passing through the purging fires of salvation and is going to emerge with higher, nobler, purer ideals, and all that. He said, Not so. He quoted a thing at me out of one of his books. Something about (as well as I can remember it) something about how "Those waves of enthusiasm on whose crumbling crests we sometimes see nations lifted for a gleaming moment are wont to have a gloomy trough before and behind." And he said:

"That's what it is with us, Hapgood. We've been high on those crests in this war and already they're crumbling. When the peace comes, you look out for the glide down into the trough. They talk about the nation, under this calamity, turning back to the old faiths, to the old simple beliefs, to the old earnest ways, to the old God of their fathers. Man," he said. "What can you see already? Temples everywhere to a new god—Greed—Profit—Extortion. All out for it. All out for it," I remember him saying, "all out to get the most and do the least."

He got up and hobbled about, excited, flushed, and talked like a man who uses his headpiece for thinking. "Where's that making to, Hapgood?" he asked. "I'll tell you," he said. "You'll get the people finding there's a limit to the high prices they can demand for their labor; apparently none to those the employers can go on piling up for their profits. You'll get growing hatred by the middle classes with fixed incomes of the laboring classes whose prices for their labor they'll see—and feel—going up and up; and you'll get the same growing hatred by the laboring classes for the capitalists. We've been nearly four years on the crest, Hapgood—on the crest of the war—and it's been all classes as one class for the common good.

"I tell you, Hapgood, the trough's ahead; we're steering for it; and it's rapid and perilous sundering of the classes.

"THE new god," old Sabre said. "High prices, high prices: the highest that can be squeezed. Temples to it everywhere. Aye, and sacrifices, Hapgood. Immolations. Offering up of victims. No thought of those who can not pay the prices. Pay the prices, or get them, or go under. That's the new god's creed."

I said to him, "What's the remedy, Sabre?"

He said to me, "Hapgood, the remedy's the old remedy. The old God. But it's more than that. It's light: more light. The old revelation was good for the old world, and suited to the old world, and told in terms of the old world's understanding. Mystical for ages steeped in the mystical; poetic for minds receptive of nothing beyond story and allegory and parable. We want a new revelation in terms of the new world's understanding. We want light

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light! Do you suppose a man who lives on meat is going to find sustenance in bread and milk? Do you suppose an age that knows wireless and can fly is going to find spiritual sustenance in the food of an age that thought thunder was God speaking. Man's done with it. It means nothing to him; it gives nothing to him. He turns all that's in him to get all he wants out of this world and let the next go rip. Man can not live by bread alone, the churches tell him; but he says, 'I *am* living on bread alone, and doing well on it.' But I tell you, Hapgood, that plumb down in the crypt and abyss of every man's soul is a hunger, a craving for other food than this earthy stuff. And the churches know it; and instead of reaching down to him what he wants—light, light—instead of that, they invite him to dancing and picture shows, and you're a jolly good fellow, and religion's a jolly fine thing and no spoilsport, and all that sort of latter-day tendency. Damn it, he can get all that outside the churches and get it better. Light, light! He wants light, Hapgood. And the padres come down and drink beer with him, and watch boxing-matches with him, and sing music-hall songs with him, and dance jazz with him, and call it making religion a "Living thing in the lives of the people." Lift the hearts of the people to God, they say, by showing them that religion is not incompatible with having a jolly fine time. *And there's no God there that a man can understand for him to be lifted to.* Hapgood, a man wouldn't care *what* he had to give up if he knew he was making for something inestimably precious. But he *doesn't* know. Light! Light—that's what he wants; and the longer it's withheld the lower he'll sink. Light! Light!"

IV

WELL, I make no extra charge for that (said Hapgood, and helped himself to a drink). That's not me. That's Sabre. And if you'd seen him as I saw him, and if you'd heard him as I heard him, you'd have been as impressed as I was impressed instead of lolling there like a surfeited python. I tell you, old Sabre was all pink under his skin, and his eyes shining and his voice tingling. I tell you, if you were a real painter instead of a base flatterer of bloated and wealthy sitters, and if you'd seen him then, you'd have painted the masterpiece of your age and called it The Visionary. I tell you, old Sabre was fine. He said he'd been thinking all round that sort of stuff for years, and that now, for one reason and another, it was beginning to crystallize in him and take form and substance.

I asked him, "What reasons, Sabre?" and he said, "Oh, I don't know. The war; and being out there; and thinking about the death of an old woman I attended once; and things I picked up from a slip of a girl; and things from a woman I know—oh, all sorts of things, Hapgood; and I tell you what chiefly—loneliness; my God, loneliness."

I didn't say anything. What could I say? When a chap suddenly rips a cry out of his heart like that, what the devil can you say if you weigh fourteen stone of solid contentment and look it? You can only feel you weren't meant to hear and try to look as if you hadn't.

Well, anyway, time came for me to go, and I went. Sabre stayed where he was.

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Would I mind leaving him up there? It was so seldom he got up; and talking with me had brought back old feelings he thought he'd never recapture again, and he was going to see if he couldn't start in and do a bit of writing again. So I pulled out and left him; and that was old Sabre as I saw him two months ago; and one way and another I thought a good deal coming back in the train of what I had seen. Those ideas in his head and that sort of life with his wife. D'you remember my telling you years—oh, years ago—that he looked like a chap who'd lost something and was wondering where he'd put it? Well, the Sabre I left down there two months ago had not only lost it but knew it was gone for good and all. That was Sabre—except when the pink got under his skin when he got talking.

All right. All right. Now that's just the prolog. That's just what you're supposed to know before the curtain goes up. Now, am I going on to the drama or are we going to bed? The drama? Right. You're a lewd fellow of the baser sort but you occasionally have wise instincts. Right. The drama.

Chapter Two

Continued Hapgood:

ALL right. That was two months ago. Last week I was down at Tidborough again. Felt I'd got rather friendly with old Sabre on my last visit, so as soon as I could toddled off to the office to look him up. Felt quite sure he'd be back there again by now. But he wasn't. He wasn't; and when I began inquiring for him found there seemed to be some rummy mystery about his absence. Like this. Some sort of a clerk was in the shop as I went in. "Mr. Sabre up-stairs, eh?" I asked. "No. No, Mr. Sabre's not—not here," says my gentleman, with rather an odd look at me.

"What, not still laid up, is he?"

The chap gave me a decidedly odd look. "Mr. Sabre's not attending the office at present, sir."

"Not attending the office? Not ill, is he?"

"No, not ill, I think, sir. Not attending the office. Perhaps you'd like to see one of the partners?"

I looked at him. He looked at me. What the devil did he mean? Just then I caught sight of an old bird I knew slightly coming down the stairs with a book under his arm. Old chap called Bright. Sort of foreman or something. Looked rather like Moses coming down the mountain with the tables of stone in his fist. I said in my cheery way, "Hullo, Mr. Bright. Good morning. I was just inquiring for Mr. Sabre."

By Jove, I thought for a minute the old patriarch was going to heave the tables of stone at my head. He caught up the book in both his hands and gave a sort of choke and blazed at me out of his eyes—by gad, I might have been poor old Aaron caught jazzing round the golden calf.

"Let me tell you, sir, this is no place to inquire after Mr. Sabre," said he. "Let me tell you——"

Well, I'd ha' let him tell me any old thing. That was what I was there for. But he shut himself up with a kind of gasp and cannoned himself into his tabernacle under the stairs and left me there wondering if I was where I thought I was or had got into a moving-picture show by mistake. The clerk had fallen through the floor or something. I was alone. Friendless. Nobody wanted me. I thought to myself, "Percival, old man, you're on the unpopular side of this argument. You're nonsuited, old man." And I thought I wouldn't take any more chances in this Biblical film, not with old father Abraham Fortune or Friend Judas Iscariot Twyning. I thought I'd push out to Penny Green and see old Sabre for myself.

So I did. I certainly did . . .

You can imagine me, old man, in my natty little blue suit, tripping up the path of Sabre's house and guessing to myself that the mystery wasn't a mystery at all but only the office perhaps rather fed up with Sabre for staying away nursing his game leg so long. By Jove, it wasn't that. House had rather a neglected appearance, I thought. Door-knob not polished, or blinds still down somewhere or something. I don't know. Something. And what made me conscious of it was that I was kept a long time waiting after I'd rung the bell. In fact I had to ring twice. Then I heard some one coming, and you know how your mind unconsciously expects things and so gives you quite a start when the thing isn't there; well, I suppose I'd been expecting to see one of Sabre's two servants, "my couple of Jinkses" as he calls them, and 'pon my soul I was startled when the door opened and it wasn't one of them at all but a very different pair of shoes.

It was a young woman; ladylike, dressed just in some ordinary sort of clothes; I don't know; uncommonly pretty, or might have been if she hadn't looked so uncommonly sad; and—this was what knocked me—carrying a baby. 'Pon my soul I couldn't have been more astonished if the door had been opened by the Kaiser carrying the Crown Prince.

I don't know why I should have imagined she was the kid's mother, but I did. I don't know why I should have looked at her hands but I did. I don't know why I should have expected to see a wedding-ring, but I did. And there wasn't one.

Well, she was saying "Yes?" in an inquiring, timid sort of way, me standing there like a fool, you understand, and I suddenly recovered from my flabbergasteration and guessed the obvious thing—that the Sabres had let their house to strangers and gone away. Still more obvious, you might say, that Mrs. Sabre had produced a baby, and that the girl was her sister or some one, but that never occurred to me. No, I guessed they'd gone away, and I said "I was calling to see Mr. Sabre. Has he gone away?"

I'D THOUGHT her looking timid. She was looking at me now decidedly as if she was frightened of me. "No, no, Mr. Sabre's not gone away. He's here. Are you a friend of his?"

I smiled at her. "Well, I used to be," I said. She didn't smile. What the dickens was up? "I used to be. I always thought I was. My name's Hapgood."

"Perhaps you'd better come in."

You know, it was perfectly extraordinary. Her voice was as sad as her face. I stepped in. What on earth was I going to hear? Sabre dying? Wife dying? Air-raid bomb fallen on the house and everybody dead? 'Pon my soul I began to feel creepy. Scalp began to prick. Then suddenly there was old Sabre at the head of the stairs. "What is it, Effie?" Then he saw me. "Hullo, Hapgood!" His voice was devilish pleased. Then he said again, rather in a thoughtful voice, "Hullo, Hapgood," and he began to come down, slowly, with his stick.

Well, *he* wasn't dead, anyway; that was something to go on with. I took his hand and said, "Hullo, Sabre. How goes it, old man? Able to do the stairs now, I see. I was down at Tidborough and thought I'd come and look you up again."

"FINE," he said, shaking my hand. "Jolly nice of you." Then he said, "Did you go to the office for me, Hapgood?"

"Just looked in," I said offhandedly. "Saw a clerk who said you weren't down to-day so I came along up."

He was doing some thinking, I could see that. He said, "Jolly good of you. I *am* glad. You'll stay a bit, of course." The girl had faded away. He went a bit along the passage and called out, "Effie, can you scratch up a bit of lunch for Mr. Hapgood?"

I suppose she said yes. "Lunch'll be on in about two minutes," he came back to me with. "You're later than when you came up last time. Come along in here."

Led me into the morning-room and we sat down and pretended to talk. Very poor pretense, I give you my word. Both of us manifestly straining to do the brisk and hearty and the two of us producing about as much semblance of chatty interchange as a couple of unfortunates waiting their turn in a dentist's parlor. The door was open and I could hear some one moving about laying the lunch. That was all I could hear, bar Sabre's spasmodic jerks of speech, and I don't mind telling you I was a deal more interested in what I could hear going on outside than in anything we could put up between us. Or rather in what I couldn't hear going on outside. No voices, none of those sounds, none of that sort of feeling that tells you people are about the place. No, there was some mystery knocking about the place somewhere and it was on the other side of the door, and that was where my attention was.

Presently I heard the girl's voice outside, "Lunch is ready."

We jumped up like two schoolboys released from detention and went along in. More mystery. Lunch at Sabre's place was always a beautifully conducted rite, as I was accustomed to it. Announced by two gongs, warning and ready, to begin with, and here we'd been shuffled in by a girl's casual remark in the passage; and beautifully appointed and served when you got there and here was— Well, there were places laid for two only and a ramshackle kind of cold picnic scattered about the cloth. Everything there, help-yourself kind of show. Bit of cold meat, half a cold tart, lump of cheese, loaf of bread, assortment of plates, and so on.

Sabre said, "Oh, by the way, my wife's not here. She's away."

The next instalment of ***"If Winter Comes"*** *will appear in the June* Everybody's.

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